

view vision visit ability academy account adds approach area attending authority background balance behaviour bring busy chair **challenge** change child children committed committees **community** confidence context contribute

critical data decision **“It’s not just who you are...** different discuss easy education

effectively engage expect **experience** expertise facing finance focus **governors** great group help

important improvement heads information **it’s what you do** involved kind knowledge

knows lawyer leadership learning level listen manager **meetings** operates opportunity outcomes parent

perspective pick point policy positive **and how you do it”** progress pupils real relationship representatives

role run same **school** senior set sitting **skills** someone specific spend **staff** strategic students suggestions

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background balance behaviour bring busy chair **& challenge** change child children committed committees

community confidence context contribute critical data decision **Garth Stahl** different discuss easy

education effectively engage expect **experience** expertise facing finance focus // 2012



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This report was written for Teach First by the education and youth-development organisation LKMco. LKMco believes that society has a duty to ensure children receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. LKMco works towards this vision by providing teacher training and school improvement and by helping a range of organisations to develop projects for young people. LKMco uses its experience to carry out academic and policy research like this across the education and youth sectors.

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The front cover of this report includes the 100 words most used in describing the qualities of a good governor. The back cover includes the 100 words most used in describing the contribution of Teach First ambassador governors.

“It’s not *just* who you are- it’s what you do and how you do it”

How can Teach First ambassador governors best address educational disadvantage?

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“It’s not *just* who you are- it’s what you do and how you do it”

How can Teach First ambassador governors best address educational disadvantage?

Executive Summary

What makes a good governor?

Being a good governor is not just about who you are – a stakeholder or an expert; it is about what you do and how you do it. The ideal governor is able to offer sensitive, well communicated and informed challenge based on good relationships and an understanding of the school’s social and educational context, applying relevant expertise where appropriate.

- The term “skills based” as applied to governor recruitment is ambiguous and hides too much complexity to be useful.
- By differentiating between ‘experience and expertise’ and ‘competencies and dispositions’ the ambiguity of ‘skills’ can be untangled.
- Models of governance that lead to local and parental representation are hugely popular however there is a tension between this and a widely held view that parents are the least effective governors, focusing too much on day to day concerns about their individual child. We call this ‘The paradox of parents’. Training and more active selection could potentially resolve this paradox. We describe existing good practice in this area.
- Knowledge, understanding and experience of education are highly valued by most although not all.
- The recent Education White Paper (DfE 2010) and the report “Who Governs the Governors” (Carmichael and Wild, 2011) have focused on governors skills in specific areas of such as law and finance. We call this ‘experience and expertise’.
- Our research suggests that ‘experience and expertise’ are highly valued but no more than ‘representation’ or ‘competencies and dispositions’.
- Part of the value of ‘experience and expertise’ is that it can function as a source of competencies.
- Effective governance involves challenging, questioning, looking beyond the information provided and being strategic. Providing support to the school and leadership team can also be valued but views on this vary.
- In order to do the above, governors need to be analytical, well informed and able to communicate in such a way as to build and maintain positive trusting relationships. We call these qualities ‘competencies and dispositions’.
- Governors need to participate in the school. Regular attendance at meetings is a minimum requirement which not all governors meet but they should also spend time in the school outside of meetings.
- In our conclusion we use the above findings to present four governor profiles showing the types of governors who appear to be most valuable to schools. We call these ‘The Forensic’, ‘The local’, ‘The expert’ and ‘The educationalist.’ Different schools need and want different types of governors and all can be appropriate in different circumstances.

Recruitment

- There is evidence that as a result of “low governance capital” (James et al. 2011), schools in challenging circumstances are particularly likely to suffer from shortages of community and parent governors as well as those with a business background.
- The word ‘shortage’ is often a misnomer and ‘vacancy’ would be a more appropriate term.

Policy Lessons

- The stakeholder model of governance is popular but mainly because of local and parental representation. It is not viewed as a barrier to effective governance and allows a lot of flexibility at present. However, so long as local and parental representation is maintained, policy changes will not be unpopular. Schools may make some changes to their governing bodies as a result of policy changes but do not feel an urgent need to do so.

- Parents are considered both the most valuable and the least effective governors by many. Training and careful recruitment should be considered solutions to escape this ‘paradox of parents.’
- Changes to the size of governing bodies met a nonplussed reaction. Schools might or might not make changes and there was little appetite or resistance to current policy.
- There was some evidence that moves towards academisation and marketisation could lead to an increased need for business and marketing skills on governing bodies.
- Many governing bodies are already asking very effective questions although some felt these were not challenging enough. The most valued questions related to pupil learning and outcomes.
- Our research gave mixed results with regards to governing bodies’ focus on strategic compared to operational concerns. Most interview respondents were well aware that their board should be strategic and considered it to be so. However, this was not always consistent and our survey data gave a very different picture. Operational involvement by governors was not always considered a problem.
- ‘Leadership of governors’ in which the Head, Chair or Clerk actively led and managed the board played an important role in making governing bodies effective. Our research suggested an acute awareness of the tension between Heads being accountable to governing bodies as well as being their primary source of information and occasional leader. Strengthening the expertise of Chairs and Clerks would therefore be a useful step in creating more effective boards with reliable information to hand. The creation of National Leaders of Governance is therefore to be welcomed.

Introduction

The context

Policy

The 2009 Education White Paper defines the role of governing bodies as *“holding the school’s leadership to account for the performance of the school.”* They are expected to do this by:

“Providing effective challenge and support, holding to account, making effective use of data and information to manage performance and ensuring value for money” - (DCSF 2009 pp.93-96)

More recently, the 2010 White Paper on Education, *“The Importance of Teaching”* recognised governors as *“the unsung heroes of our education system”* (DfE, 2010, pp. 71). It outlined a range of measures to ensure they are *“better respected and deployed”* and more focused on *“strategic direction”* (ibid). These measures included better information and training as well structural reforms. The White Paper pledged to:

“legislate in the forthcoming Education Bill so that all schools can establish smaller governing bodies with appointments primarily focused on skills.” (ibid).

What sort of “skills” these are is unclear but the policy paper *“Who Governs the Governors?”* (Carmichael and Wild, 2011) continues this theme:

“Too often schools have sacrificed quality in order to ensure proportional representation from parents, local politicians and particular professions to the detriment of other groups or individuals who may not easily fall into a specific category. ... we believe that governors should be appointed on the breadth of skills and experience they would bring” (pp.13)

Wider changes in education such as the move towards academies, the marketization of the school system, pledges to enhance school and teacher autonomy and the reduced support from LAs and SIPs also raise questions as to how the role of governors might change.

Governance for Change

Teach First’s ‘Governance for Change’ initiative seeks to inspire, mobilise and equip ambassadors to address educational disadvantage as governors, particularly in schools in challenging circumstances.

Teach First has agreed a target with the TDA to place 130 ambassadors in schools by 2013 and 300 by 2018. The aim is for at least 90% of these to be placed in schools that meet Teach First eligibility criteria.

There is currently a surplus of ambassadors waiting to be placed. There are 60 current ambassador governors and 25 waiting to be placed. Teach First therefore takes a strong interest in governance and recognises the important place it should take in addressing educational disadvantage.

The report

This report is set against a backdrop of significant policy change affecting governance and the desire to create more opportunities for ambassadors to address educational disadvantage through governance. We therefore focus in on Teach First eligible schools to identify the governance needs of schools in these challenging circumstances.

In Part 1, we explore perceptions of what makes a good governor. In Part 2 we focus on what governors do. Part 3 explores recruitment and governor ‘shortages’. Part 4 draws together our conclusions.

Throughout the report we explore feelings about current policy changes including:

- The stakeholder model of governance
- The size of governing bodies
- The impact of autonomy, academisation and marketisation on governance
- The questions asked by governors

- The strategic role of governors
- The role of parents
- Strengthening chairs of governors and clerks

Methodology

The project used mixed methods. These included

- In depth semi-structured interviews with Heads, Chairs of Governing Bodies, Clerks, Ambassador governors and external stakeholders (including local authority governor services)
- Large scale analysis of quantitative data on school's requests to the School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS)
- A survey of Teach First Ambassadors governors

We also used some desk research, one meeting observation (incorporating structured and unstructured techniques) and two open verification interviews with governance 'experts' (the Director of the School Governors One Stop Shop and the Chair of the National Governors' Association).

Semi-structured Interviews

Twenty-one recorded interviews took place. These were carried out either in person or over the phone. They lasted between 25 minutes and 70 minutes and were based on the structure set out in Appendix 1. These were analysed to explore the key research questions. Coding was open, beginning descriptively with categories emerging from the analysis.

Sample

Respondents came from 12 different schools and 3 different stakeholder organisations. We created an in depth case study of one school in which the governing body which had taken an active role in school improvement by interviewing the Head, Clerk, Chair and Ambassador Governor and combining these with a meeting observation. In three other schools we interviewed either the Chair or Clerk as well as the Head.

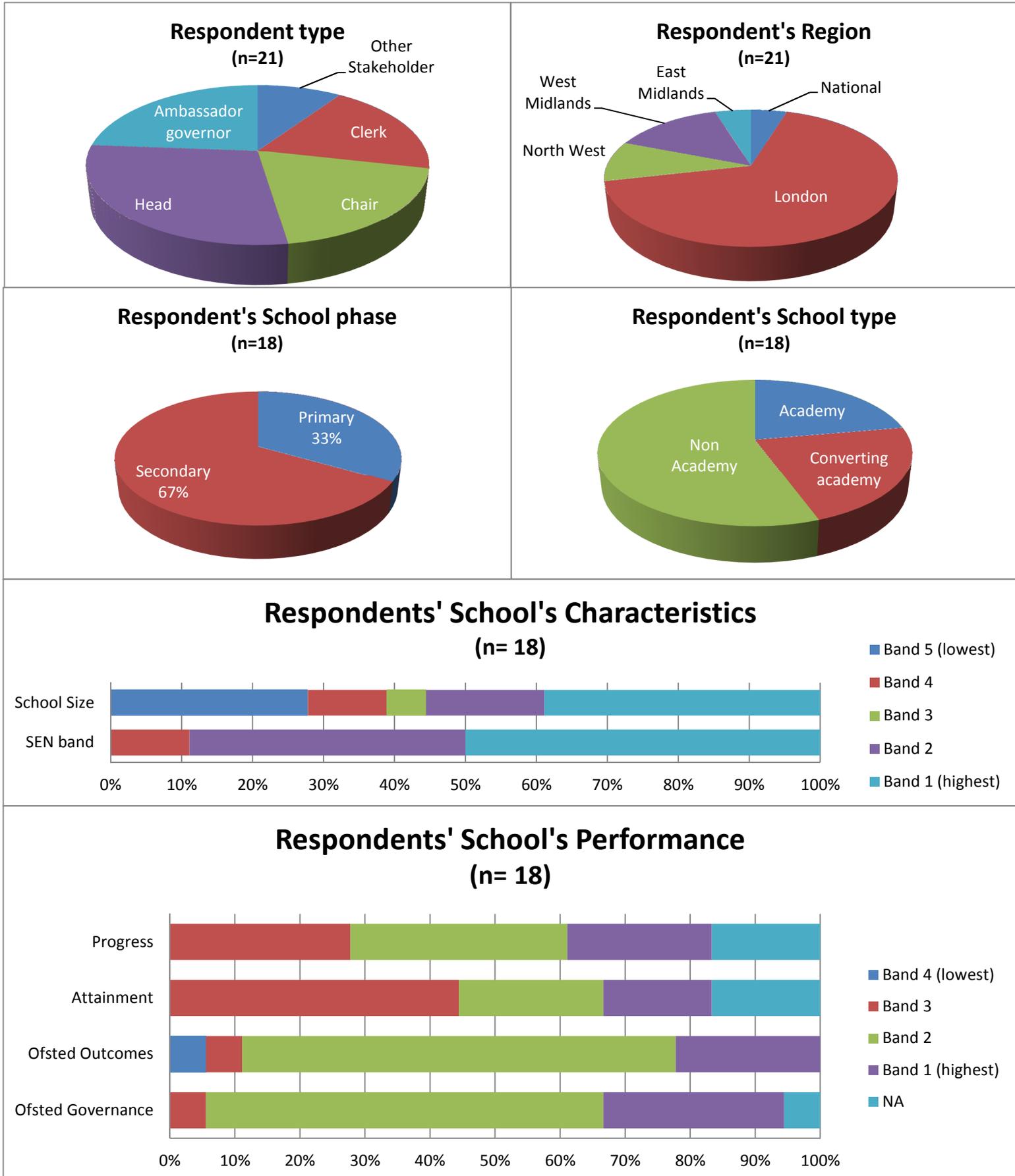
Our sampling technique was to select random numbers and apply these to a list of all the schools with Teach First ambassadors, (either as teachers or governors). We then excluded schools that did not meet Teach First eligibility criteria¹ and contacted ambassadors teaching in the schools to ask them to set up a meeting with the Head Teacher. Where ambassadors replied that the Head was unavailable we attempted to speak to the Clerk or Chair of governors. After some interviews with Heads there was an opportunity for the Clerk or Chair of governors to be interviewed as well.

We contacted ambassador governors in selected schools directly and invited them to interview. We also asked them to help set up interviews with the Head, Chair and/or Clerk.

We recorded details of respondents and their schools' characteristics. Performance data, SEN data and school size were retrieved from the DfE Performance Tables. The technique used for deriving the bands from these can be found in Appendix 2:

¹ To meet the Teach First eligibility criteria, schools must have more than 50% of their pupils living in the lowest 30% of the IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index), or have results that fall below the lowest 30% of the national distribution.

Interview Sample Characteristics



Respondent

| Respondent | Number of respondents |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Other Stakeholder | 2 |
| Clerk | 4 |
| Chair | 4 |
| Head | 6 |
| Ambassador governor | 5 |
| Total | 21 |

Region

| Region | Number of respondents |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| National | 1 |
| London | 14 |
| North West | 2 |
| West Midlands | 3 |
| East Midlands | 1 |
| Total | 21 |

Phase

| School Phase | Number of schools |
|--------------|-------------------|
| Primary | 6 |
| Secondary | 12 |
| Total | 18 |

School Type

| School type | Number of schools |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Academy | 4 |
| Converting academy | 4 |
| Non Academy | 10 |
| Total | 18 |

School Performance

| | Ofsted Governance | Ofsted Outcomes | Attainment | Progress |
|------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------|----------|
| Band 4 (lowest) | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Band 3 | 1 | 1 | 8 | 5 |
| Band 2 | 11 | 12 | 4 | 6 |
| Band 1 (highest) | 5 | 4 | 3 | 4 |
| NA | 1 | 0 | 3 | 3 |

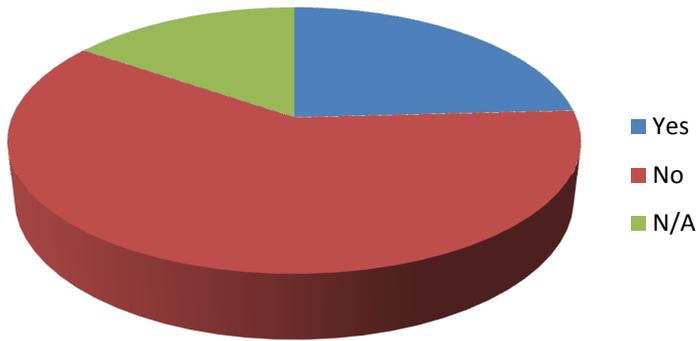
SEN and School Size

| Band | SEN band | School Size |
|------------------|----------|-------------|
| Band 5 (lowest) | 0 | 5 |
| Band 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Band 3 | 0 | 1 |
| Band 2 | 7 | 3 |
| Band 1 (highest) | 9 | 7 |
| Total | 18 | 18 |

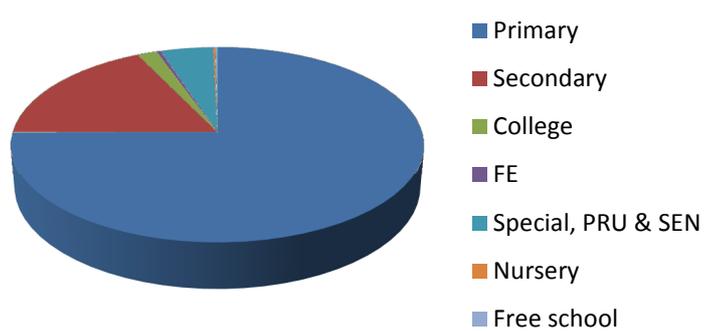
SGOSS governor request data: quantitative analysis

Data on 512 requests for governors sent by 415 schools was analysed to see what schools were looking for, to analyse differences between Teach First eligible and non-eligible schools and to explore the type and location of vacancies.

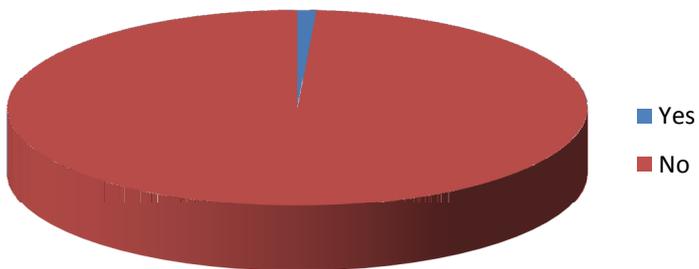
Teach First eligible?



School Type



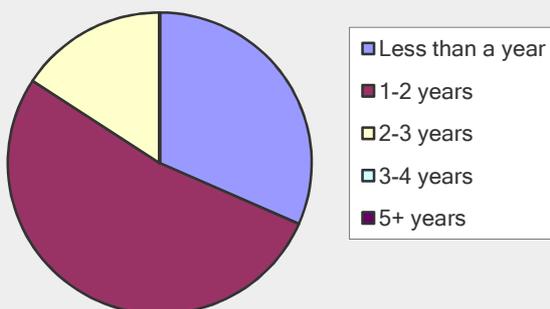
Academy?



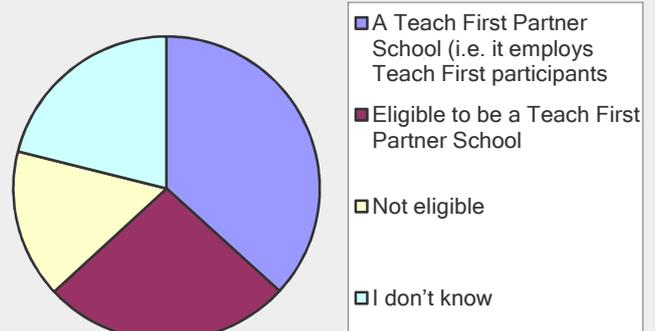
Ambassador Governor Survey

A survey was sent to 55 ambassador governors. 19 responded. The survey included a mixture of closed quantitative questions and open responses.

How long have you been a governor?



Is your school...



Part 1: What are the governance needs of schools in challenging circumstances?

Interviews

We analysed 23 detailed interviews to understand what qualities respondents associated with good governance. The following qualities were referenced in 20% or more of interviews. The categories emerged from the coding process.

| Qualities of Good Governors | Interview Sources Referencing |
|--|-------------------------------|
| Representative | 21 |
| Engaging and participating | 19 |
| Time and attendance | 18 |
| Understanding the social context and community | 17 |
| Educational background or knowledge | 16 |
| Motivations and alignment | 15 |
| Training and practice as a governor | 15 |
| Representative of community | 14 |
| Data | 13 |
| Challenge | 11 |
| Analytical | 11 |
| Finance | 10 |
| Building positive trusting relationships | 9 |
| Critical friend | 8 |
| Communication | 8 |
| Legal | 8 |
| Understand context of the school | 7 |
| Pupil focused | 6 |
| Diplomatic | 6 |
| Inquisitive | 6 |
| Business | 6 |
| HR | 6 |
| Variety | 5 |

From these qualities we identified eight categories and analysed how widely covered they were.

| Area | % of Interview Sources Referencing (do not add up to 100% due to multiple requests) |
|---|--|
| Competencies and dispositions | 100 |
| Experience and expertise | 100 |
| Variety and representation (NB note overlap with "understanding context") | 100 |
| Behaviour and approach | 95 |
| Understanding of context (NB note overlap with representation) | 91 |
| Time and attendance | 86 |
| Motivations and alignment | 71 |
| Training and practice | 71 |

Details of which qualities appeared in each category can be found in Appendix 3.

Variety, Representation and Understanding of Context

We treat these areas together due to significant overlap

Representation

For most respondents representation was at the heart of good governance:

“I think the governors reflect the community which is incredibly important, particularly the parent governors. Well even the co-opted governors, they reflect the community that we live in and I think it is very important for the governing body to do that.” - Head Teacher

For this Head Teacher and all other respondents, representation was crucial in avoiding “*alienation between what the organisation is attempting to do and the local community*” (Head Teacher). Similar language such as “*dislocation*” was used by other respondents.

In many cases, representation referred to parents and was important because “*it shows parents that you value them*” (Head Teacher):

“The parents themselves, obviously they, we’re a very important part of their child’s life so all those different people have different demands of the school. So therefore, they should be part of what we’re trying to do as a school and that they all have a part to play in improving student outcomes as well.” – Head Teacher

As the above quote suggests, for some schools, representation feeds into pupil outcomes, for example by bringing in information about factors that might be affecting pupils.

“Community Governors will know what the issues are for communities” –Clerk

“in order to move the school forward you have to understand what you’re dealing with specifically.”
– Other Stakeholder

One respondent described the importance of representation on exclusion panels and the problems faced in this area.

“but you know I sit there doing exclusions with three middle class males, sometimes two males one female for example, and it would be so much better when you’re dealing with predominantly kids of west Indian origin families to have some sort ethnic representation and I do think that’s something that I think all schools struggle with a bit” – Clerk

This supports the argument of PricewaterHouseCooper’s 2007 study cited in James et al. (2010) which shows that Head Teachers were concerned about lack of diversity on their governing bodies.

For another, community representation was important in communicating with the community

“I’m trying to get another councillor on board as well, because that gives you a link with the community. If you want to get a message across, you can do it through them... . It would have been good to go to somebody and say, look, can you spread this about the school, the good things about the school.”
– Chair of governors

Representation is therefore valued because it:

- **Is a tool for gathering views**
- **Provides information about factors affecting pupil outcomes**
- **Ensures the governors reflect the population and pupils it serves.**
- **Supports communication and marketing**

Policy Lesson 1

The stakeholder model of governance

Respondents' continued focus on community representation raises serious questions at a time when the Education White Paper and moves towards academisation have heralded a move away from the stakeholder model which is currently the main tool in attempting to secure representative governance.

However, respondents were not particularly concerned about upcoming changes. They recognised that changes were guidance rather than prescription and so most said they would continue as they are at present. Some also agreed that fixed quotas were unnecessary and agreed with Carmichael and Wild (2011) who argue that qualities should supersede category. That said, respondents did not see a problem that needed solving. For most, representation was a quality in itself and they did not see a tension between the two. None seemed to think that the stakeholder model was stopping them from seeking the governors they wanted.

In most cases respondents' support for the stakeholder model was directed towards parental, staff and community representation.

There was less enthusiasm for local authority representation:

"I don't think local authority will be there, necessarily" – Head Teacher

"Well I'm very keen on parent Governors and staff Governors, I think the other divisions between LEA and Community and the other ones seem to be probably you know ways of securing recruitment or getting people co-opted on really. I think it is vital that there are parent Governors and that there are teacher Governors." – Chair of governors

Our research suggests that all our respondents will welcome the requirement to have a minimum of 2 parent governors which is set out in "The Importance of Teaching" (DfE 2010)

This is an important area which we shall return to in Policy Lesson 6: 'The Paradox of Parents' and in exploring types of vacancies in Part 3

Understanding of context

There is certainly some overlap between "representation" and "understanding" and one might argue that many of (but not all of) the factors which led to respondents valuing representation could be addressed by having Governors who understand the context. Some respondents for example described the importance of:

"A willingness to learn about the school and its context, its circumstances. Like where its pupils are drawn from. What are the issues there? What are the demographic issues? You know does for example the school have a high proportion of free school meals than the national average?" – Other Stakeholder

"I think when things go wrong for me it's when the people just have no understanding of context so they make suggestions based on their own children's experience or their own experience and they are pushing an agenda that lacks understanding or experience." – Head teacher

One ambassador governor explained that one could have such an understanding by having been a teacher rather than necessarily being a representative governor.

“I guess things yeah understanding the challenges in dysfunctional areas and things that you could have been a teacher, a normal teacher in the same schools and had those same...” - Ambassador governor

Another ambassador governor placed a caveat on the importance of representation:

“I think you need representatives from all those groups but I don’t think you can just say, oh well because we’ve got community, parents etc., the Governing Body is great it has to go if within those kind of representatives you don’t have people that have a useful skill mix.” – Ambassador governor

Variety

Several respondents objected to talking about what makes a good governor, preferring to talk about a good “governing body” which combined wide representation and a range of skills and expertise. One described:

“the collective consciousness of the governing body, bringing to the governing body as a body, experiences that collectively allow the governing body to operate in an informative way, if that makes sense.”

– Head Teacher

Policy Lesson 2

The Size of Governing Bodies

The Education White Paper (DfE 2010) set out the intention to “legislate in the forthcoming Education Bill so that all schools can establish smaller governing bodies”(pp.71) on the grounds that “smaller governing bodies with the right skills are able to be more decisive, supporting the head teacher and championing high standards” (pp.71)

Carmichael and Wild also present this argument (2011). However, for many respondents the need for variety placed a limit on how small a governing body could be and they felt that it needed to be “big enough to do the job”:

“So I think smaller is better but only where you can still get the right skills out of them and so on”

- Ambassador Governor

“It has got to be large enough in order to have a spread of expertise but small enough in order to make meetings sensible”

- Head Teacher

“you need a certain amount of people to get enough different view-points”

- Ambassador Governor

Many respondents feared that smaller governing bodies would make filling and reaching quora on committees, or finding enough people to go through the different stages of disciplinary procedures difficult:

“the problem would be managing the committees, you know, we’ve had problems where committees were not the proper ratio of governors at the meetings.”

- Chair of Governors

One Head Teacher also expressed fears that a small governing body would create an elite group of governors who ran the school causing “conflicts with the leadership and management of the organisation.” Another echoed fears about concentrating power in too few hands:

“(With a small governing body) There’s a huge amount of responsibility on any one individual and if you have people who can’t attend meetings, if you’ve only got a governing body of 10 people and three people don’t turn up, you’ve got seven people making major decisions for a school and that doesn’t seem right to me.”

- Head Teacher

On the other hand this needed to be balanced with the fact that larger meetings were “unmanageable”. Such meetings ran the risk of not affording enough opportunities for everyone to speak or to get into the detail of issues.

Large meetings could also result in governors coasting and could make it easy for them to “duck out of things” because they could rely on someone else. Several respondents described this problem:

“I think part of the approach they have at the moment is’ let’s get lots of people because then at least some of them will turn up and be enthusiastic’. I think if you could whittle it down to fewer people but all of whom were very committed, that would be better.”

- Ambassador Governor

In terms of an ideal size, views varied from 8 to 22 with the average perhaps somewhere in the middle but most people’s views were too uncertain or broad to put a figure on it. One replied “18, 20, 22?” and another “However many it is”. What was clear is that there was no sense that policy forced them to have a number they did not want. Boards were already being creative by, for example, creating small executive groups where necessary. Others had already changed their size or were in the process of doing so. There was therefore no great perceived need for policy changes. That said, neither was there any particular resistance.

Experience and Expertise

In this report we avoid using the word skills where possible. This is because of the very different ways this term is used by respondents. Whilst some say *“the other skill factor is community”* others talk about *“financial skill”* and others talk about communication or being analytical as skills. ‘Skills based’ recruitment is therefore rather ambiguous in meaning and so we make a distinction between ‘Experience and expertise’ (similar to what James et al 2010 describe as *“functional skills”* pp. 17) and ‘Competencies and Experience’. It is from this distinction that this report gains many of its insights. In our interviews, education, finance, law, HR and business were the most frequently described areas of experience and expertise.

In some cases expertise was valued because it helped in responding to particular issues as with a school undergoing building works:

“we have (Governor name), a Health and Safety expert, so he’s been quite crucial with the building side of anything that’s been going on” – Head Teacher

“we do currently have an on-going legal dispute with a supplier and it does make sense for me to just ask more legal management questions, about whether that’s going to end up in a mess or not.”

- Chair of Governors

Such experts were viewed by some as a useful addition to specialist committees because the depth of challenge they could offer:

“So I’d like to have someone with financial expertise, so that when we’re in the finance committee, which I sit on, we can really challenge the school when the Bursar talks us through variance models and why costs have fluctuated etc. I think someone with a real business background could really challenge.”

– Ambassador Governor

Experience and expertise were also viewed as a *“springboard”* for effective governance overall:

“More effective Governors have arrived with some sort of skill set that’s particularly relevant... so they’ve arrived with some sort of expertise, which I think gives you a bit of a springboard then for participating more effectively, because you can get into it a bit more quickly, stuck with it, takes a long time to work out what the hell you’re there for as a Governor.” - Head Teacher

This could also link back to variety as well as to the theme of bringing an external perspective or a different way of looking at things:

“experience of the world, so I think about maturity and hopefully exposure to different organisations run in different ways for different purposes, I think as a Governing body I would look to the chair for a mix of different experiences in organisations.” – Chair of governors

Some respondents had concerns about using governors’ professional expertise because they did not perceive it to be the role of governors to provide the support that the school could buy in. For them governance should be focused on what they believed money could not buy – local knowledge and understanding.

“I can’t understand why there’s the expectation that governors should do my job, or other people’s jobs for them. If I want support from HR or from finance, I would employ or go to an expert to actually employ somebody for that level of support. I wouldn’t expect that from the governors.” – Head Teacher

The strength of feeling here shows that in some cases schools object very strongly to certain approaches to governance.

This Head Teacher's objection is similar to one of the arguments made by James et al. in "The Hidden Givers"

"Recruiting governors because of their functional skills may suggest that they have operational responsibility, which is not part of the governors' remit. Indeed, arguably such skills should be available to the school from other sources." - James et al 2010 pp. 17

There is a potential difference here between the needs of primary and secondary schools due to their different capacity for bringing in external expertise.

Many noted the importance of lawyers and accountants not getting dragged into giving professional advice. An 'expert chair of governors' explained that *"I don't really want to do my day job at night as well"*

On the other hand, this was not necessarily a problem since they could apply their expertise in other ways:

"Now for example we may well have a personnel expert but the personnel expert would use their experiences in personnel management to inform the discussions that they have, not to advise a school on x, y or z. We would take advice from the personnel people who... with whom we have a contract with. But their general background knowledge would be able to say well actually that was good advice or not" – Head Teacher

The issue of 'experience and expertise' in education gave rise to mixed views. Most respondents emphasised the importance of understanding education and having *"knowledge about what are the wider educational issues."* (Head Teacher). Many felt this could come from experience in education or similar fields such as training. However, in other cases, knowledge of issues such as data and current education policy was most important and was therefore more about expertise than experience.

Some views on the importance of knowledge and understanding of education were less to do with experience and expertise and more to do with understanding, empathy and values:

"the common skills gap I suppose is for all governors, either the good ones or the bad ones, is understanding what education is and what the attendant pressures are on a school and the school system. And I suppose ignoring the headlines. It's a bit of a political football education and it's not always that Mr Gove is right, or Ed Balls is right or Ofsted are right, there's somewhere in between, and in the middle of that there are children who don't really care about Gove, Balls and Ofsted, but do care about their mates and their learning." – Head Teacher

Interestingly, the word "skills" is used in yet another way here. Again this is probably not what the White Paper meant by "skills based recruitment".

Policy Lesson 3

The effect of autonomy, academisation and marketisation on governing bodies

There is some evidence that school governance needs may change as a result of moves towards academy status. Such a view would certainly be supported by problems early on in the academy program, for example when several schools failed to submit their accounts. Experience of business may play a role in avoiding such mistakes. Support is lent to this view by the National Audit Office's warning that:

"The expansion of the (academy) programme increases the scale of risks to value for money – particularly in the areas of financial sustainability, governance and management capacity"

- NAO, 2010

Some of our respondents were beginning to engage with this issue:

"it may be that the academies,... are looking for something quite different. Looking for somebody with more of a commercial approach because they've got to set themselves up as a company effectively, find their own staff, set their own salary structures. That is a very different scenario to a school like mine which still utilises the services of the local authority, very different"

- Other Stakeholder

"I might be looking for finance skills because obviously we are more accountable for our own money now and although we have a very good Bursar or no doubt Finance Manager as he will be, I will be looking for accountancy or finance skills probably as top of the shop"

- Chair of Governors (converting academy)

"for example business people who come in and work as governors with us actually have an excellent way of conveying things in terms of their business arrangements and business practices that we can actually learn from as an educational establishment because we are having to be more business-like and an academy in particular is run as a business so that business background and that business acumen and coming in and looking at how the school is operating and then sharing their experience in that regard is extremely helpful to us"

- Head Teacher (a new academy)

Even the Head quoted earlier for her scepticism of expertise based recruitment recognised that as her school converted to Academy status there might be some impact on the governors she needed. On the other hand, continuity was a bigger factor in her comments than change.

"The only thing that I would particularly be interested in, is perhaps within the HR vicinity, in terms of bringing on expertise into the governing body, in terms of managing HR, particularly as we go into an academy and we are beginning to have the inter-dynamics directly face to face with some of the employment law and so that we didn't fall foul of the employment law, that is the only one area, at this moment in time."

- Head Teacher (converting academy)

Several schools recognised that the marketization of the school system could impact on the role of governing bodies. However several felt they had already risen to this challenge, that it was 'nothing new' and that they already had the expertise needed to respond. For some, the required 'expertise' for this role was to understand the needs of the local community so that these could be best served. When prompted, some respondents recognised that they might need to think about sourcing more marketing expertise in the future but said they would cross that bridge when they came to it.

We also asked respondents whether a less prescriptive environment would impact on the governors they needed but changes were perceived as minimal. Some recognised a need to find a replacement for the SIP who in a few cases was viewed as having made a useful contribution. However, there was not a strong sense that governors would take their place.

Competencies and Dispositions

The “expert chair of governors” quoted earlier, expressed doubts as to the relative importance of expertise:

“So experience: very good, very valuable but I think you know probably on balance attitude and approach and commitment is the main thing.” - Chair of Governors

This view was widely shared. Whilst ‘experience and expertise’ was referenced by all respondents, the bulk of discussion was focused on what we label ‘competencies and dispositions’. We use the term to refer to ‘soft’ or transferable skills and ways of approaching people and issues. Most important amongst this category were the qualities of ‘being analytical’, ‘using data’, ‘building positive trusting relationships’, ‘communication’, ‘being diplomatic’ and ‘being inquisitive’ (we will address ‘inquisitiveness’ in our discussion of ‘challenge’). One of the reasons why these qualities were so highly valued overall was that they enable governors to ask questions effectively, something we will see in Part 2 is crucial to good governance.

Being analytical and using data

Being analytical involves looking at information, working out what is relevant and drawing conclusions.

“I think it’s important that Governors have scrutiny skills, by which I mean able to read documents and sift the good from the bad, the important from the unimportant. So allow for detail and the facts that stand out”
– Chair of governors

There are also elements of being analytical which link to strategic thinking. For example one Head Teacher described

“Being able to see where they want to be and see the steps to getting there. So instead of just jumping in and thinking we’ve got an issue, it’s about those skills of being able to think ahead and think okay, well where do we want to be, what’s blocking us along the way and what’s each of our roles in trying to overcome that?”
– Head Teacher

The ability to analyse data is “*absolutely key*” for the majority of respondents. This view is further emphasised by the interviewees’ references to data in discussions of current weaknesses and challenges of governance. One chair of governors described interpreting and using data as the most difficult thing about governance. This echoes the findings of James et al. (2010):

“Some of the governing bodies gained significant benefit from individual governors who had a fascination with data...” – pp.52

“where governing had failed in the past, the evidence indicated that the governing body processes – particularly scrutiny of performance data –were inadequate”- pp.79

We shall return to data and outcomes in Part 2 when we explore what governors do.

Communicating effectively, managing relationships and being diplomatic

The ability to “*communicate well... is important... in terms of getting on with people and... discussing things in a sensible way*” (ambassador governor). Relationships are crucial in this and provide the “*trust base*” which allows governors to question and challenge. However, as one Head explained, this “*is not always the easiest thing to do*”:

“(they need) to be able to manage quite complex situations because dealing with Head teachers and senior leaders is not always the easiest thing to do in a way that is going to be constructive and to help the schools to move forward rather than be a block” – Head Teacher

Where this did not happen, respondents felt a poor relationships and a lack of trust could result and serious problems would ensue, making governance like “*trying to wade through treacle.*” (Chair of governors)

Being diplomatic is not only about maintaining relations with the Head but also about maintaining relationships amongst the governing body. The same head explained that:

“you’ve got a mixed ability group and you can hear something a parent governor who may not be up to speed but might say want to be very concerned by a governor asking them well why aren’t our Somali girls doing as well as they should? If you’re a Somali parent, how does that feel? (sic)” – Head Teacher

Communication involved being *“articulate and vocal”* (Head) but also balancing this with the need to avoid *“dominating meetings”* (ambassador governor). At times negotiation plays an important part in governance and this competency was therefore also an important part of communication.

‘Competencies from experience’

Competencies are not entirely distinct from expertise. In Punter and Adams’ study of SGOSS governors (2010), the Heads and Chairs surveyed described 77% of SGOSS governors as making a very valuable or valuable contribution to *“Challenging the leadership to effect improvements for pupils”* and 76% did so for *“Challenging the leadership to ensure all pupils’ needs are met”* (Pp.11). These abilities may well come from the background of the governors that SGOSS recruits. The *“expert chair of governors”* provides evidence for this conjecture.

“(my background as a lawyer) enables me to read the documents and spot things quickly, which is the scrutiny point I made and it also helps with questioning, two of the three or four core skills of a lawyer are questioning clients, getting to the underlying point and scrutinising documents so that does help a lot.”

- Chair of governors

We therefore see that experience may well be instrumentally useful because of the transferable skills it provides rather than in and of itself. We call this ‘competencies from experience’. As one Clerk said:

“Well I think because they are successful in investment banking I think they are very sharp analytical people. And so I think they are in board meetings there’s not a lot of waffle if you know what I mean, I think they’re very sort of focused, and I think they are able to look at stats and they can read very easily from stats where things are going wrong, where things are going right, and I think there’s a very sort of strong business like determination” - Clerk

The value of expertise in acting as a source of and proxy for competencies contrasts with the picture of a board of experts who act as a source of specialist support and challenge in particular areas at particular times. For example, the above Clerk’s argument is very different to the following Head Teacher:

“It’s great if you need a lawyer and you’ve got one who knows the school as well. That’s always very, very handy” – Head Teacher

Motivation and Alignment

Both in describing what they consider when recruiting governors and in describing what makes a good governor, most respondents talked about the importance of motivation and alignment to the school’s vision or ethos. This echoes the arguments made by Balarin et al. (2008) and cited by James et al. (2010)

“Governors consider the requirement of new or potential governors to support the ethos of the school to be the most important attribute of new governors” - Cited in James et al. (2010 pp. 17)

Several respondents agreed that this was the most important factor, overriding most other considerations.

“I’ve even had governors who’ve not been able to read and write and those governors, because they cared so much about the school, were also giving that challenge, ‘well are you doing the right thing?’ ‘Is this enough?’ ‘Are you making sure that my child ... unlike myself, illiterate, so they can get a job?’...I think that one of the

key aspects of working in the sort of school in which we're working in, is that both the governors and the leadership team, and I would say, the majority of the staff, have this shared ... it may not be identical, but a shared vision about, you know, caring enough about the kids to make sure that they get a bloody good education basically." – Head Teacher

Like this respondent, many respondents linked motivation to a shared belief in a particular vision or the school's 'way of doing things.'

"An understanding of, poverty is not an excuse for underachievement actually, and it's just a contributing factor or a barrier that needs to be overcome, and it actually means absolutely nothing, it's an absolute irrelevance" – Head Teacher

There is also a link here to the 'disposition' of 'drive, urgency and impatience' described by one clerk as *"business like determination"*. In some cases this was seen as an emergent property of 'experience and expertise' One Chair of governors described the value of *"impatience with process and the time it takes to do things."* This Chair of Governors linked his "impatience" to his background and experience in industry and several others echoed this:

"You get very, very successful people to sponsor an academy and their professional reputation is on the line and they won't allow that to fail because they are associated with it" – Head Teacher

Both this Head and his Clerk came from a school in a successful academy chain and went on to describe the contribution of Trustees and Governors from professional backgrounds extremely vividly.

Teach First ambassadors also talked about motivations and impatience and how they were driven by the sense of mission they had gained from Teach First. This was also recognised by the respondents who worked with them.

As with 'competencies and dispositions' we therefore see that 'experience and expertise' can contribute to motivations. Yet it can also come from having a stake in the community or wanting the best for one's children. The key issue for many of our respondents was the motivation rather than where it came from. Ultimately, what mattered the most was what governors did and how, rather than who they were.

Case Study – Governor of the Year

The following case study brings the qualities we have described to life and shows them instantiated in the practice of an exceptional governor – a recent winner of “Governor of the year”. It shows how the qualities described above helped him to be successful and introduces some of the ways of governing which we will explore further in Section 2

What did he do?

This governor’s school is judged “Satisfactory” by Ofsted and is no stranger to tremendous challenges. Early in 2011 the staff, unions, local businesses, parents, and Labour councillors united against the Head. Surrounded by public meetings and malicious internet writings, hundreds of students demonstrated and the staff eventually went on strike over alleged mismanagement at the school. The decision to send the Head on ‘gardening leave’ was made by the Chair of Governor. The Chair of Governors demonstrated a range of skills which ultimately kept his school out of Special Measures. Despite many challenges, this particular governor displayed tremendous resilience and perseverance in unifying a team of governors in order to handle a potentially crippling situation.

What allowed him to do it?

Previous to the dismissal of the Head Teacher, three strategic actions allowed the Chair of Governors to lead his board through the difficult process of removing a Head Teacher. When first appointed to the Chair of Governors, he quickly discovered that the body was too big and there was *“a lot of bickering and you couldn’t get any decisions made.”* The solution was the establishment of an executive group of around five members to make quick decisions alongside the use of smaller sub-committees focused on key initiatives. To promote involvement and integration a ‘Faculty Day’ was introduced to unite governors and create a space for people to share concerns. This approach meant *“... the governors interacted, whereas in the evenings they were rushing off, clock watching and rushing off” - consequently “there was plenty of time to discuss issues.”*

Secondly, deploying his strategic mind-set, the Chair of Governors looked towards succession and with this in mind he designated other governors to chair each meeting. This management technique *“livened it up; it was different for every meeting and people were more interested.”* His approach also created a sense of ownership around the role as a governor and provided a training opportunity. He therefore demonstrated effective ‘leadership of governors’ and strategic thinking.

Third, if a governor was not attending regularly and getting involved then they were evaluated through a performance management process and if improvements were not made, they were quietly asked to leave. He therefore showed high expectations and a willingness to make difficult decisions in order to hold people to account for the high standards he set.

While the Chair of Governors had expertise in finance and marketing as well as the ability to prioritise short term and long term goals, he was also able to draw on other areas of expertise on the governing body such as law and journalism. Central competencies the Chair of Governors displayed were keeping perspective, consistently re-imagining the role of a governing body, implementing improvements swiftly and simply recognizing that he was *“not a quitter”*. While he continues to see his governing role as *“a critical friend”*, in a crisis situation he recognised the need to become more directly involved. In such situations, a Chair of Governors has to be versatile, willing to adopt duties that may not necessarily in the remit of the post.

The Chair’s social purpose, values and motivations drove his approach. He saw the role of governors to be getting the *“the best for the children.”* He was able to rise above petty egos and infighting, holding true to his mantra that: *“If it upsets the head, it upsets the head. If it upsets the governors, it upsets the governors. But whatever decision is good for the school, I can justify it, that’s the way I look for it.”*

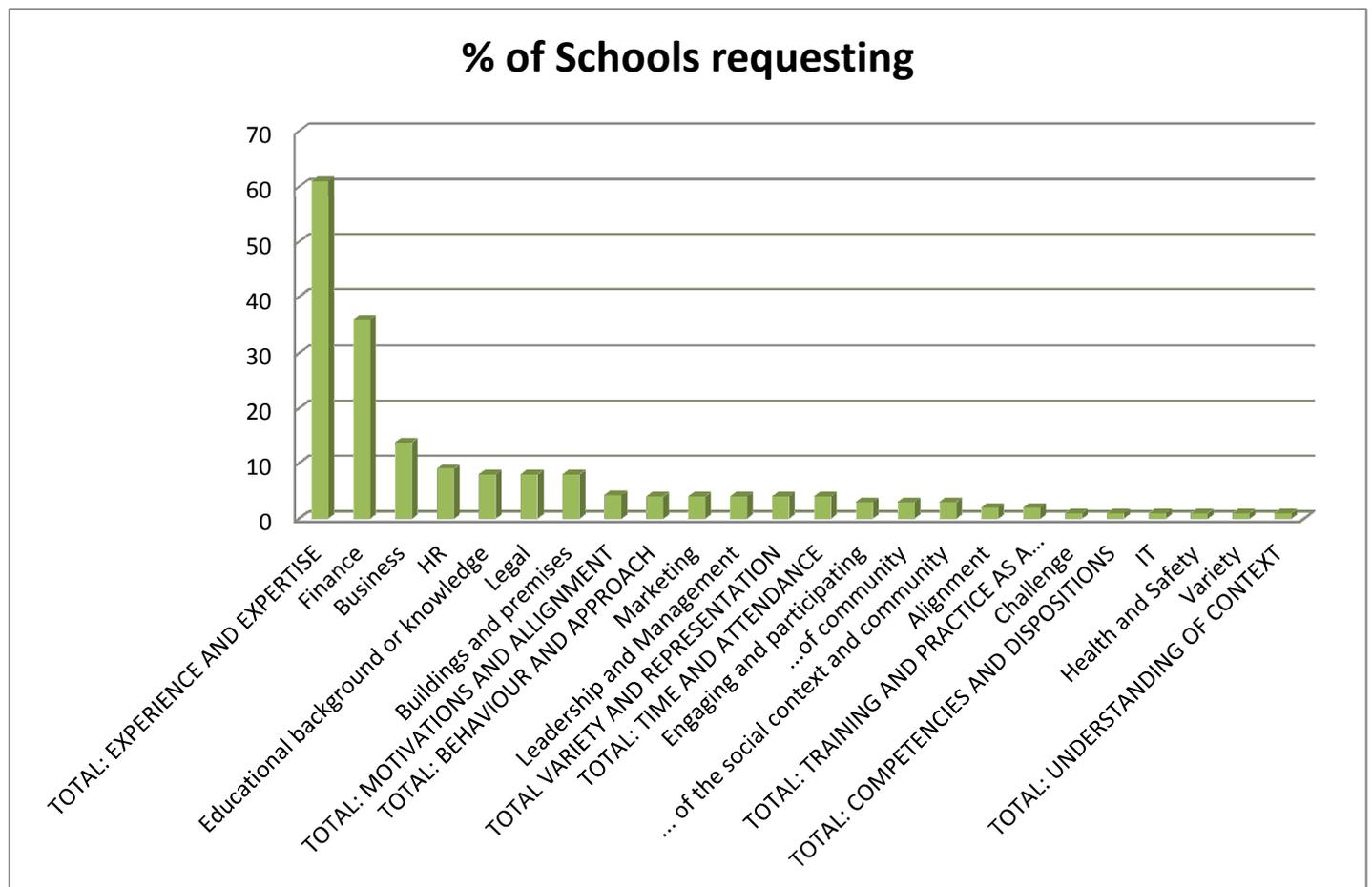
His altruistic motivations also led him to invest a huge amount of time in his role, up to two days a week. Analytical thinking and continual reflection over key decisions allowed the Chair of Governors to see the positive results of his actions and these helped him to persevere even when decisions were unpopular and controversial.

As a result of his hard work this Chair of Governors saw an overall improvement in the governing body and renewed interest in the school on the part of the community. When asked 'So what do you think the main skills or qualities you have, that you bring to your role as a governor?' he responded 'common sense.'

Analysis of Data on Requests to SGOSS

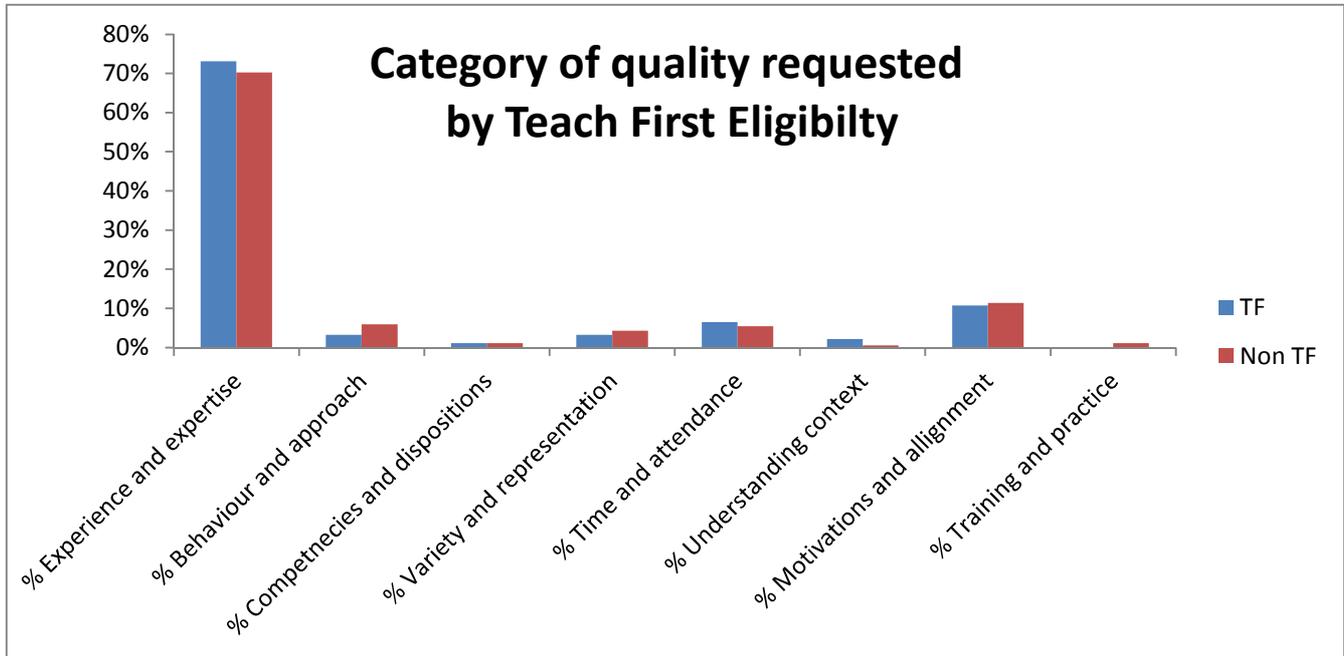
We analysed 513 requests to SGOSS for governors to see what qualities were requested (qualities were specified in most but not all requests). We then categorised these using the categories employed above. These told a very different story to our interviews.

| Area | SGOSS Requests referencing | % of Schools requesting |
|-------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Behaviour and approach | 16 | 4 |
| Competencies and dispositions | 4 | 1 |
| Experience and expertise | 253 | 61 |
| Variety and representation | 15 | 4 |
| Understanding of context | 5 | 1 |
| Time and attendance | 17 | 4 |
| Motivations and alignment | 35 | 4 |
| Training and practice | 7 | 2 |

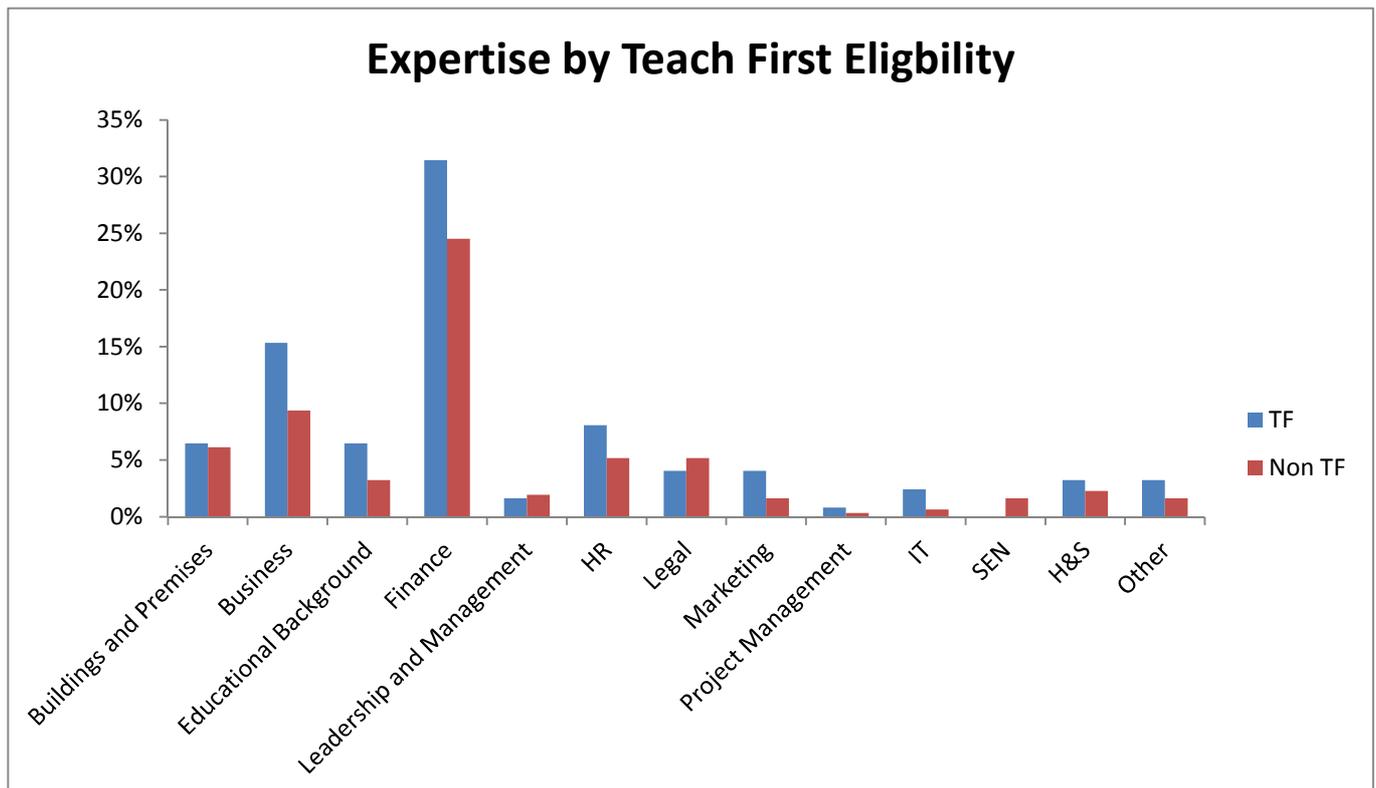


Differences between Teach First eligible and non-Teach First eligible schools

Data from SGOSS allowed us to compare the requests made by Teach First eligible and non-Teach First eligible schools to see if there was a difference in what they needed from their governors.



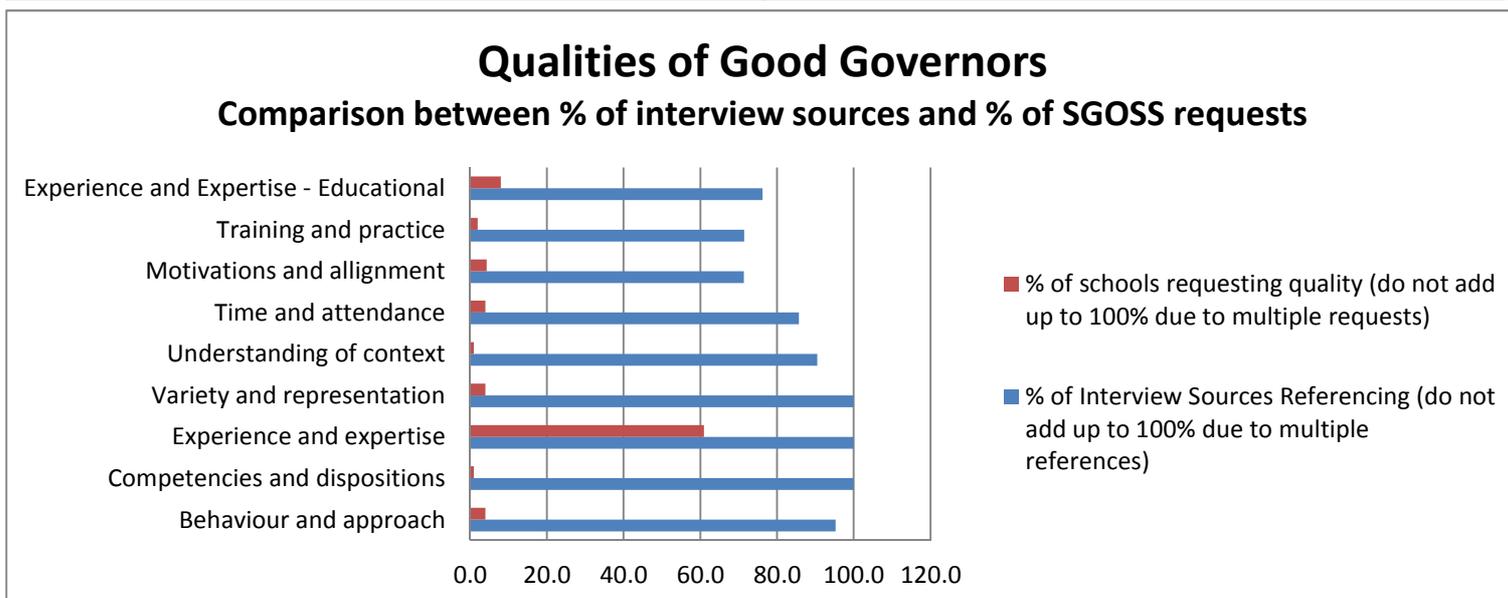
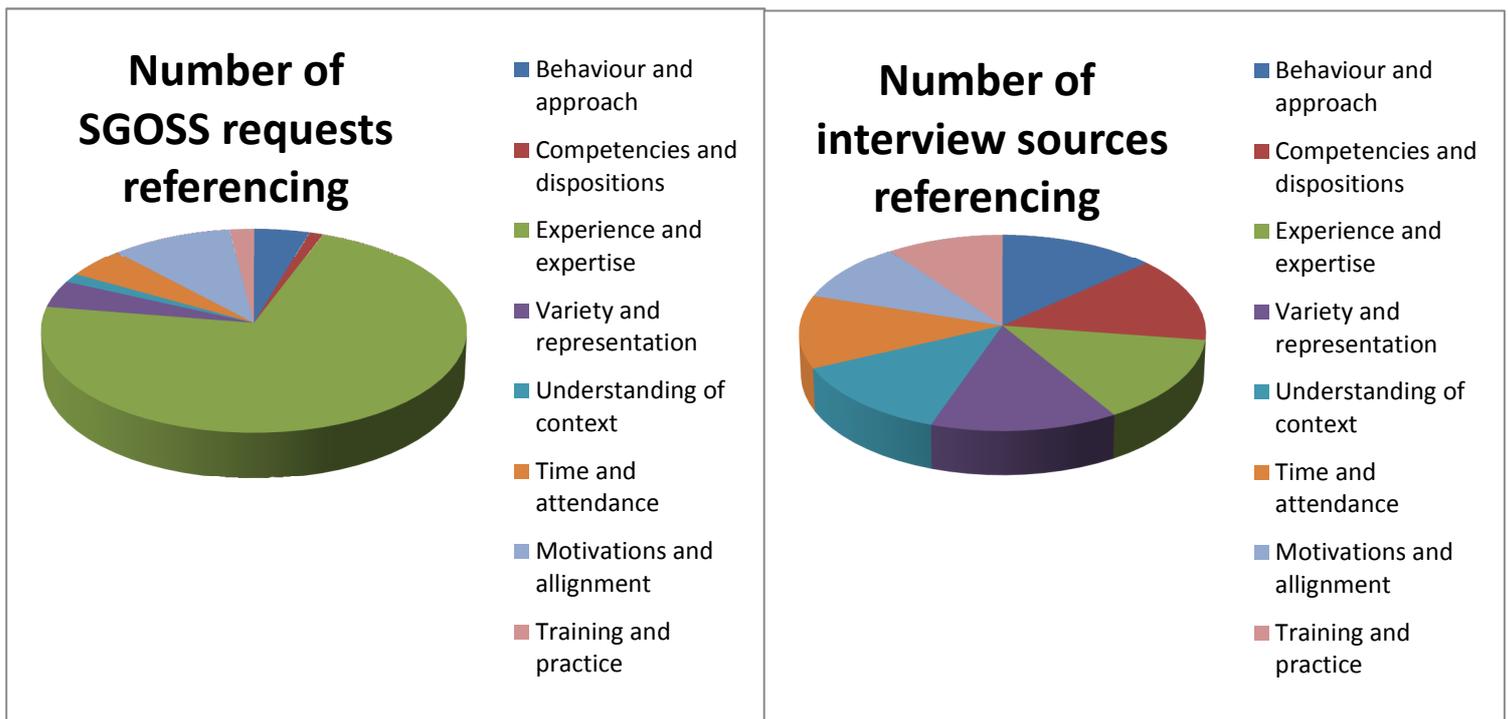
This graph shows that there is little or no difference between the categories of qualities requested by Teach First and non-Teach First eligible school. A more in depth look at the category of 'Experience and expertise' shows a little more variation

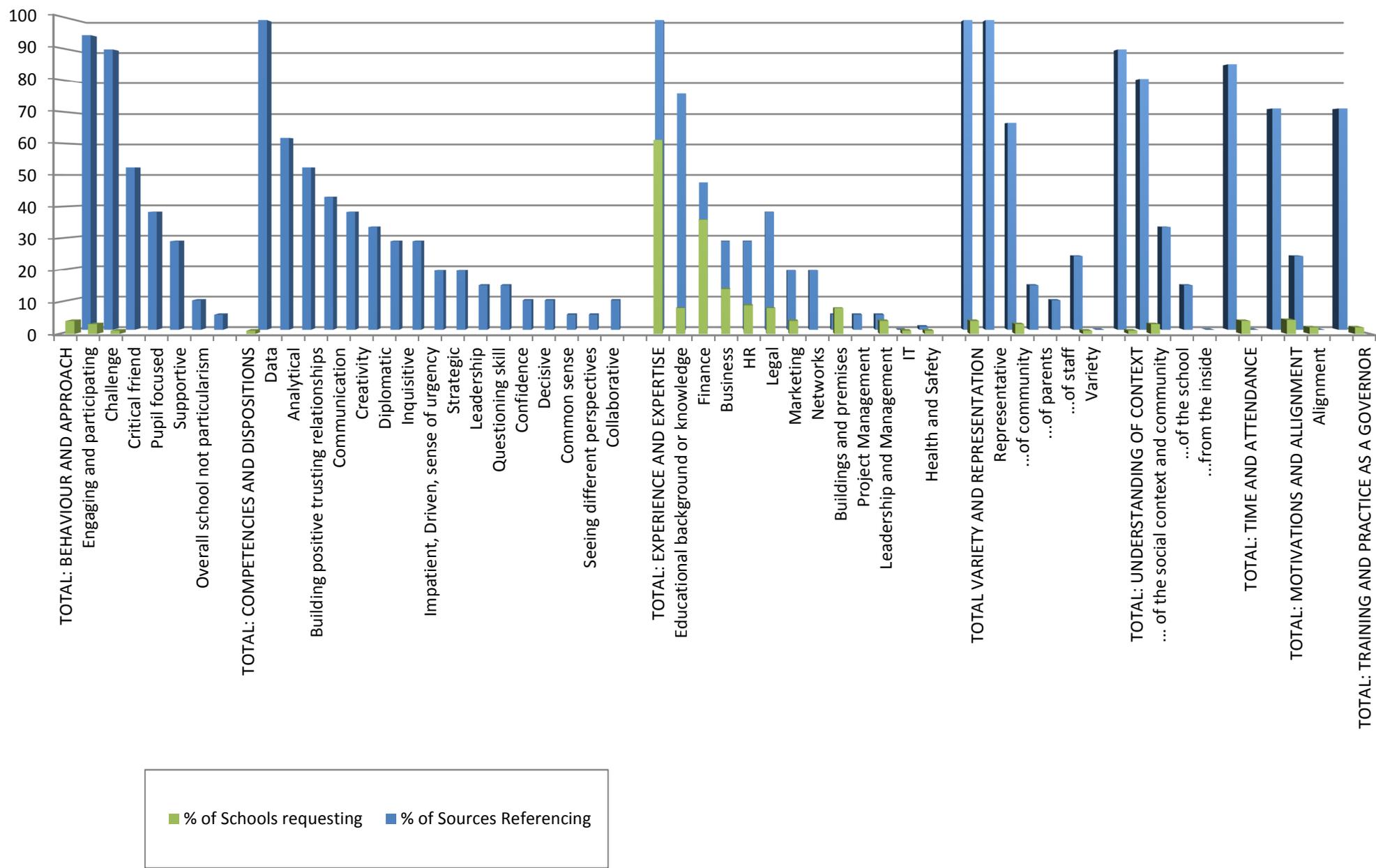


However, on closer inspection these differences were revealed to be fairly insignificant. The largest differences, in Business and in Finance, are of 6% which represents only 7 Teach First schools.

The striking difference between SGOSS and interview data

The striking point from this data is the huge incidence of requests for experience and expertise in SGOSS requests (in particular for finance and business), a rate of incidence which is highly disproportionate to what appeared in our interview data. This difference is clearly illustrated in the following four graphs. We will discuss the reasons for this discrepancy later in this section.

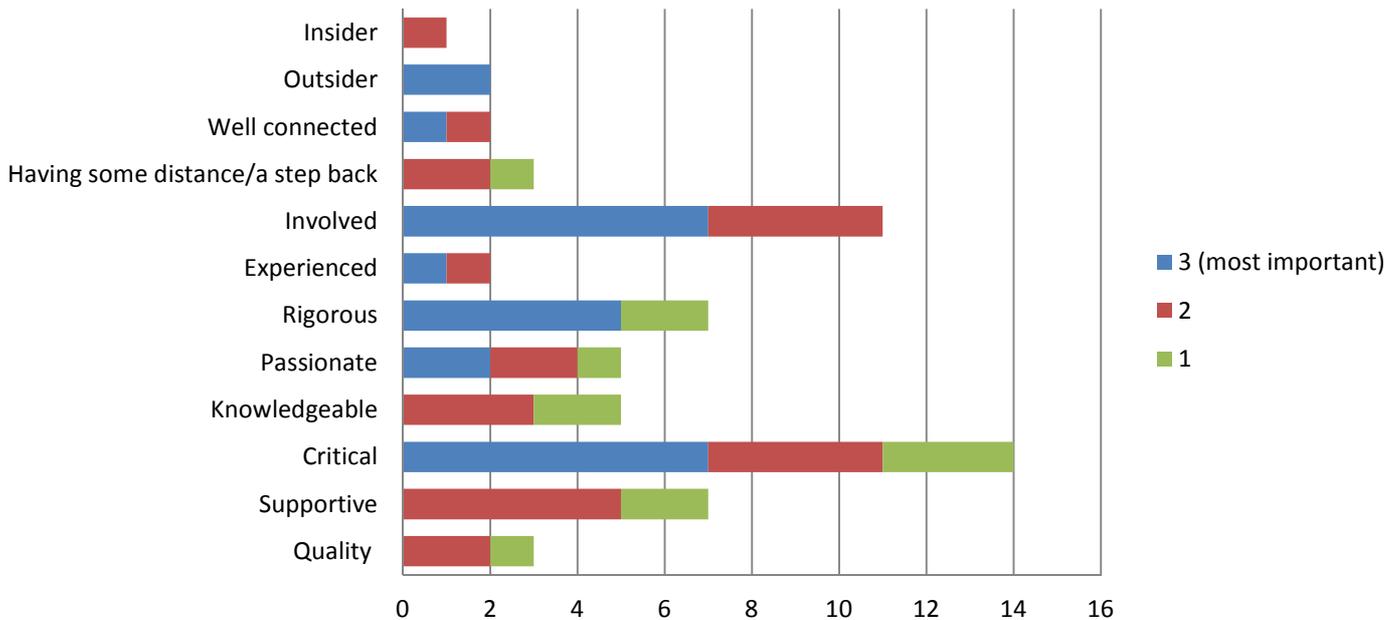




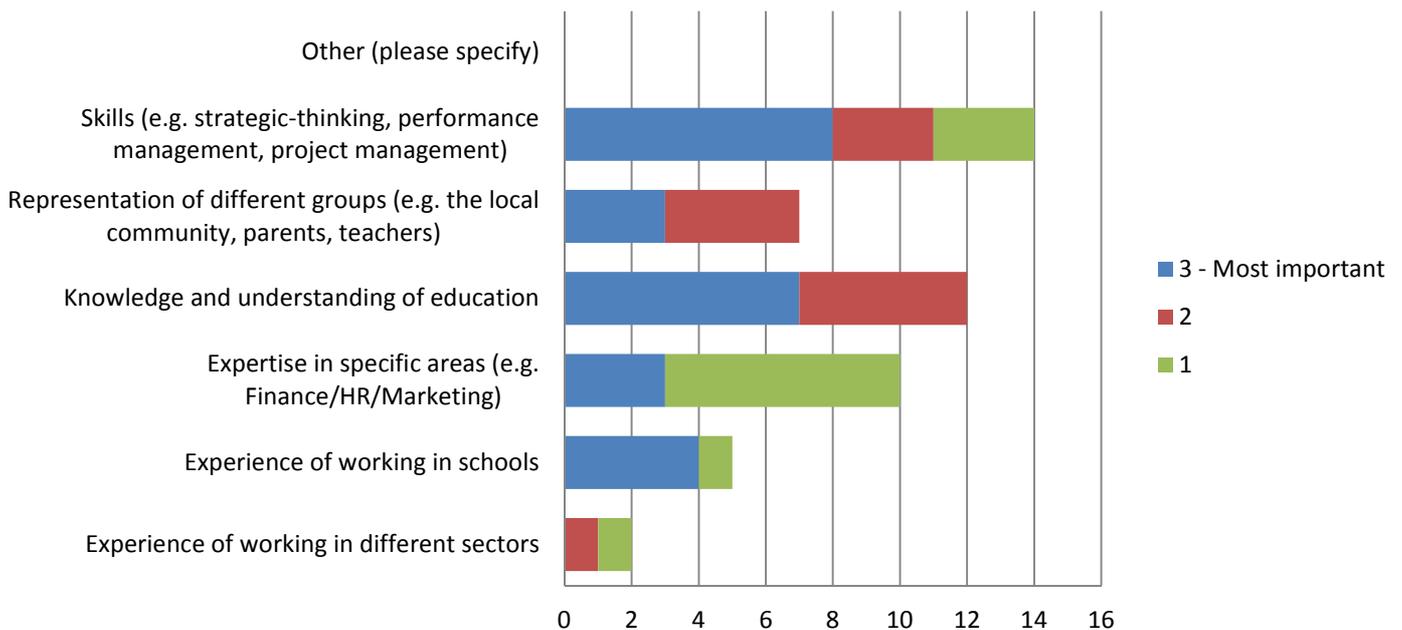
The Ambassador Governor Survey

Our ambassador governor survey brought together the views of 19 ambassador governors.

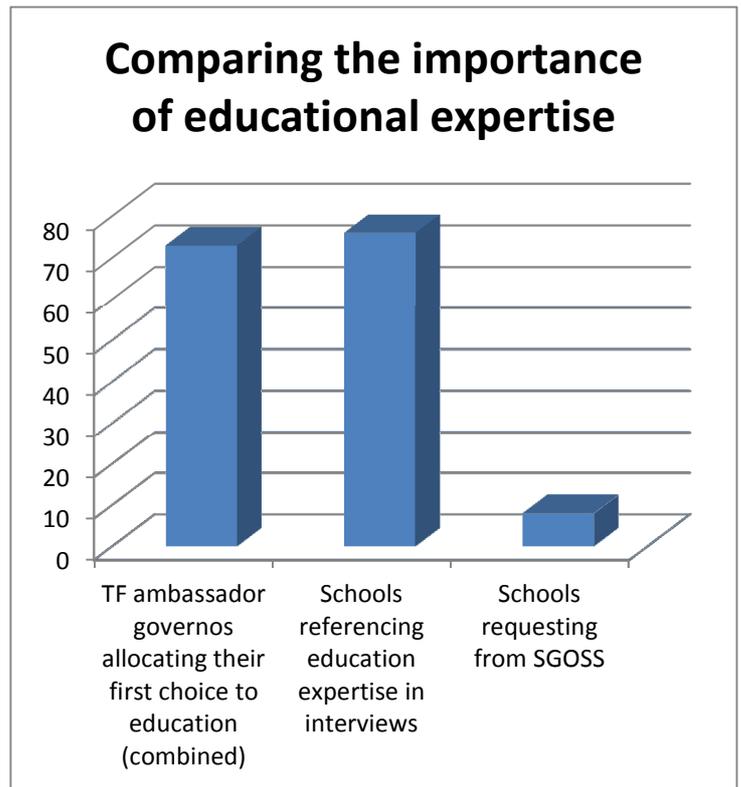
Most important things to take into account in recruiting governors - TF ambassador governor survey



Qualities of a Good Governor - Ambassador Governor Survey Responses



Unfortunately this survey was carried out previous to the emergence from interviews of the categories we have used to describe governor qualities. However the description of good governors as ‘critical,’ ‘rigorous’ and ‘involved’ which emerges from the first graph certainly has strong parallels to interview respondents’ prevailing description of ‘engaged and participating’ and ‘analytical’ governors. Certain categories such as ‘skills’ are hard to compare because they reflect the ambiguity in the term ‘skills’ and could refer to any combination of ‘experience and expertise’ and ‘competencies and dispositions.’ Either way, it is notable that ‘skills’ are highly valued by respondents; they have been ranked highest overall and have the highest number of first preferences in response to the second question.



The other striking areas are ‘knowledge and understanding of education’ and ‘experience of working in schools’. If these were combined they would easily overtake “skills” as the top quality (both overall and in first preferences). This is perhaps not surprising given that it reflects ambassadors’ own background. Ambassador governors felt so strongly about this that several gave a first or second preference to both areas. This makes for an interesting comparison with our other sources of data (although figures for interview references are distorted by not being ranked and so all a respondent needed to do was mention it.)

Interpretation

The contrast between the qualities emerging from the SGOSS data analysis and the interviews (and answers to the first question on qualities in the ambassador survey) is initially perplexing. The obvious explanation is that whilst qualities other than ‘experience and expertise’, ‘representation’ and ‘understanding’ are valuable qualities, they are not where the shortages or need are located and so there are no requests in this area . That is to say, perhaps competencies and representation are important qualities but found in abundance. However, this interpretation is quickly refuted by looking at respondents’ answers to questions about “shortages”.

- I:** *Looking now at skills gaps and recruitment and so on, is this school currently experiencing a shortage of Governors?*
- R:** *Parent Governors.*
- I:** *Any other types?*
- R:** *No.*
- I:** *Any other types of skills that are missing, or experiences that are missing?*
- R:** *No.”*

- Clerk

This answer is by no means unique. Questions about what types of governors schools would like more of, which are hardest to recruit and so on almost always resulted in similar answers: members of the local community and parents. Several said that they would prefer parents or community members who also had expertise or ‘skills’ but this does not back up the initial conjecture that such qualities are valued but abundant.

The high rate of requests to SGOSS for expertise is therefore not because this is where shortages are concentrated. It is however easy to explain why 'being representative' and 'local connection' are not better represented in the SGOSS sample: it is not SGOSS's niche and therefore not what schools would approach them for. This is made clear in much of SGOSS's marketing. Even Punter and Adams' 2010 report on SGOSS was called "*Governors Mean Business.*" It is therefore unsurprising that most of the schools that approach SGOSS are looking for the governors SGOSS markets itself as specialising in. On top of this, we noted in 'experience and expertise' that in some cases, an interest in this category was a response to a circumstantial need. One could therefore imagine that schools experiencing a circumstantial need for a type of governor would approach SGOSS as the best source to meet the need.

Expertise based labels are also easier to work with than the more fluid and ambiguous descriptors of being a 'good communicator', 'analytical' or 'enthusiastic.' They are therefore less likely to show up in requests or responses to closed questions. Our concept of 'competencies from experience' also suggests that 'experience and expertise' can function as a source of and perhaps a proxy label for competencies. The in-depth nature of our interviews, lasting over an hour in some cases, made it much easier to bring out underlying feelings about what went in to making a good governor and this was a significant strength of our research methods.

Part 2: What do governors do and how?

What governors do and how has a huge impact on the quality of governance and is a consequence of their qualities.

A note on the relationship between the governing body's characteristics and school effectiveness

Our interviews yielded very similar views of governance amongst all respondents interviewed and no trends or correlations appeared to link the qualities and actions to recorded school performance or indicators of governance. Even if they did, correlations drawn from a sample this size would be nigh on meaningless. Nonetheless, we attempted a comparison between the categories of qualities referenced by schools which were graded outstanding and non-outstanding for governance by Ofsted. Variations were minor and insignificant.



Our conclusions as to what makes good governance are therefore based on the views of respondents and the examples they gave of how governor actions had resulted in improvements.

We can also draw on numerous descriptions of the differences between governance in high performing or well governed schools and less successful ones. The challenge is to show causality. The work of Ranson et al. (2005a, 2005b) goes some way to doing this by looking at schools that have improved. The conclusions Ranson et al. draw are borne out in the practice of some of the governing bodies we studied which had taken a significant role in moving their school forward.

Ranson et al. (2005a) describe 'executive boards' with governors...

"assuming overall responsibility for the business aspects of the school: the budget, staffing, and the infrastructure of building. Their concern is with their legal responsibility and accountability for the school. The head assumes overall responsibility for curricular and pedagogic aspects of the school. The board will, however, probably develop a strong role of scrutiny over the performance as well as the policies and financial well-being of the school" - pp. 311

They argue that:

“schools with ‘executive boards’ are all associated with improving and attaining schools. Given the catchment areas of the high-improving schools, the governing bodies are more representative of their parent communities than is typically the case.” – Ranson et al. 2005a pp. 314

In “The Participation of the Volunteer Citizens in School Governance” Ranson et al. describe four case studies of schools that improved significantly (2005b). They describe how:

“(the local authority) began to reconstruct governing bodies with the ‘social capital’ of experienced, class advantaged volunteers, from the public services but also local commerce. These reconstituted governing bodies began to fulfil functions that were vital to the recovery of each institution and are indispensable to any effective public service. Practice was brought under scrutiny: questions began to be asked.”

- pp. 364

James et al. show a link between quality of governance and pupil attainment at primary but not secondary level (James et al. pp. 31.)

Ofsted (2010) report that there is a correlation between strength of governance and school performance:

“Inspection evidence tells us that there is a relationship between effective governance, the quality of leadership and management, and the quality of provision and pupil achievement” - pp. 4

The same report describes the characteristics of effective governing bodies (see Appendix 4). Some of these are to do with the qualities of the governors discussed in Part 1 such building relationships of trust. Others are to do with how governing bodies exercise governance. Characteristics Ofsted describes which resonate particularly strongly with our findings include:

- Being decisive,
- Systematic monitoring of targets
- Availability and use of information
- Focus on achievement
- Honest school self-evaluation
- Clear roles and responsibilities
- A core of key governors
- Carrying out observations and visits
- Asking challenging questions focused on improvement using skills
- Being well organised and using time
- Effective clerking
- Recruitment using external networks to fill identified gaps
- Induction for new governors
- Being reflective

Case Study – The business of governance

We studied one governing body where governors appeared to have taken a significant role in improving the school. We carried out four interviews and a non-participant observation of a governing body meeting.

School x was described as previously having been the “7th worst school in the country”. It went through a period of great turbulence until such a time as two governors (the previous Chair who remains as a governor and the current chair) took a leading role. A change of Head and Chair followed and several members left the board. Rapid improvement followed (as the DfE performance graph below shows). However, in 2011, results were disappointing which forced the board to re-evaluate its approach. The likely depth of this re-evaluation was clear when we asked the head how he knew that the governing body shared his vision:

R: *I think, that’s a good question. I don’t know how I can tell. I hope they do, and if they don’t, then I’m in the wrong job and they need to find another head teacher I guess is the ultimate answer isn’t it, they appointed me. I must have sold them something, because after a bit of temporary headship here, they appointed me to the full time post. They gave me two years on a temporary contract, but yeah. I assume they trust me. We’ll see tonight because our results have stalled. You ask me that at half eight and I’ll tell you the proper answer. The buggers don’t want me. It’s a good question.*

The meeting began with a discussion about recruitment of governors focused on bringing in more parent governors. This topic was returned to later:

“Discussion on whether lack of parents matters

Discussion about the value of one member of the community who is a governor and understands what its like trying to get your children into the children’s centre. >> “but you can find that out in other ways”

– Field notes

Discussion of parent governors also featured prominently in interviews with the Chair, Clerk, Head and an Ambassador Governor and we will return to this issue later under recruitment.

Governors were asked to provide some insights from recent visits to the school. After this, discussion quickly moved to results and showed several features of excellent governance. The conversation was challenging, evidence based, pupil outcome focused and strategic, as fields notes show:

Challenging question “what happened”

Difficult announcement of results. Head: “we failed”

Discussion of why- led by chair “2 possibilities as to why”

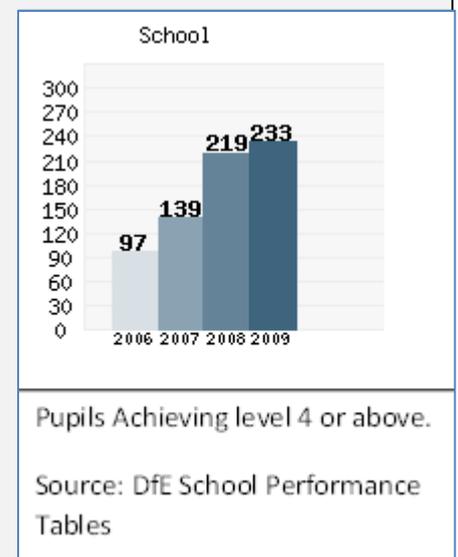
“We can look at individuals and zoom in or we can zoom out and look at the big picture”

Analytic discussion of causes

“What is it that we can do about the environment?” –Chair

“We need to think carefully about how we can...” - Chair

“We don’t want to get into drilling” –Chair



Very strategic discussion- “we are now going to have to change the way we do things”

“This is where we have a discussion about philosophy – the exams answer is that we do more tests, but is that what we want to do OR could we find a creative way?”

“Year 3 and 4 have not made enough progress”

“we can’t carry on doing the same thing because the same thing isn’t working”

- Field Notes

Despite the level of challenge this was all done in a good humoured way that was clearly founded on strong relationships. The discussion was concluded with the board tasking the Head to provide an analysis of the results and options for moving forward at the next meeting.

A governor with particular expertise in leadership and management then led a reflective self-evaluation exercise in which governors worked in groups to evaluate their performance under three titles:

- Being strategic
- Acting as a critical friend
- Providing accountability to community

The board considered its strengths and challenges to be:

| Strengths | Challenges |
|------------------|--|
| Commitment | Broader challenge around the make-up of the group Risk of leaving people out |
| Child focused | Connections with parents Parents understanding what’s going on Not being representative and not enough parents |
| Data available | Using data Access to and use of knowledge about what’s going on in the school |
| | Need to check understanding |
| | Relying on some people as leaders in particular areas |

During this discussion the board considered what would be involved in aiming for an outstanding grade from Ofsted for governance, on the grounds that gaining this was more to do with paperwork than actually impacting on the school:

“How much do we care about getting a tick in the box from Ofsted on governance”

“Well I guess we only care if it will have an impact on the school” Ambassador Governor

- Field Notes

Key features of good governance

The above case study illustrates several features of what governing bodies need to do which were also reflected in interviews and survey data.

- Questioning
- Engaging and Participating
- Being challenging, a critical friend and looking beyond the information provided
- Being strategic

- Providing support
- Focusing on pupil outcomes and data
- Leadership of governors

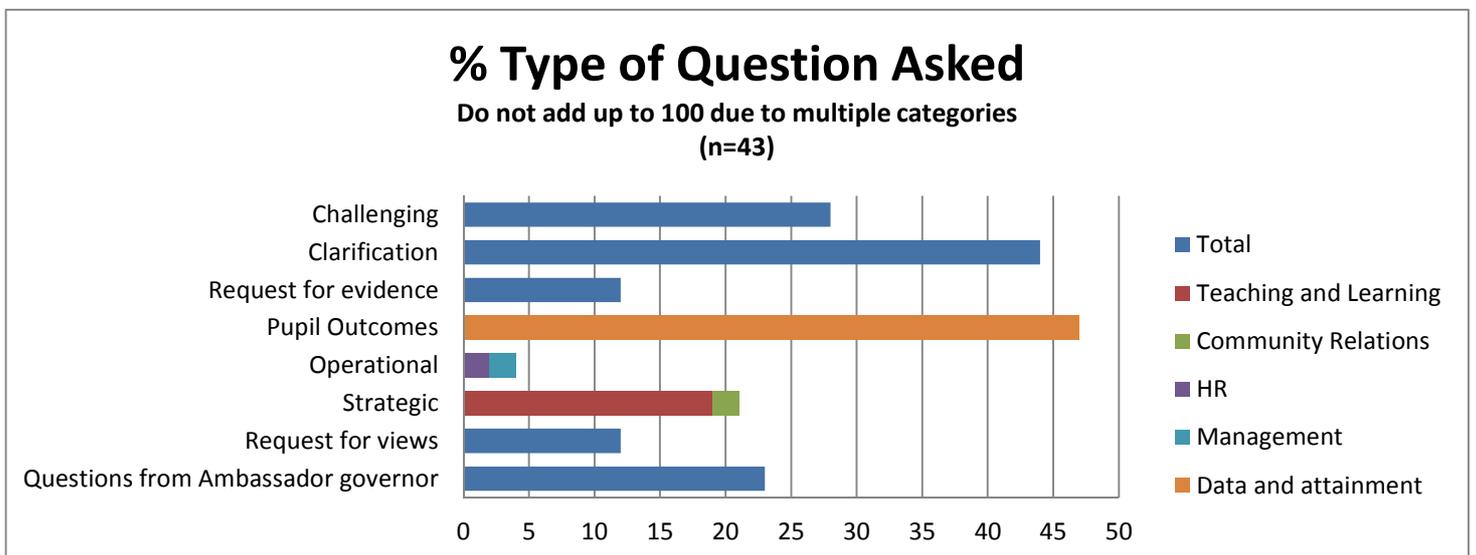
Questioning, challenging and pupil outcomes

A crucial part of what governors do is questioning and this has been referred to at length in much of the literature on governance:

“Schools with governing bodies that have established routine practice of questioning and deliberating school policies and practices are more likely to be achieving schools. Questions invite the school: to reflect on their policies and practices; to consider alternative perspectives; and to provide good reasons for the proposed actions that should stand the test of conversation. The outcome of such questioning and deliberation will be a deeper understanding of an issue and the appropriate policy and practice to accommodate its complexity.”

- Ranson 2005a pp.318

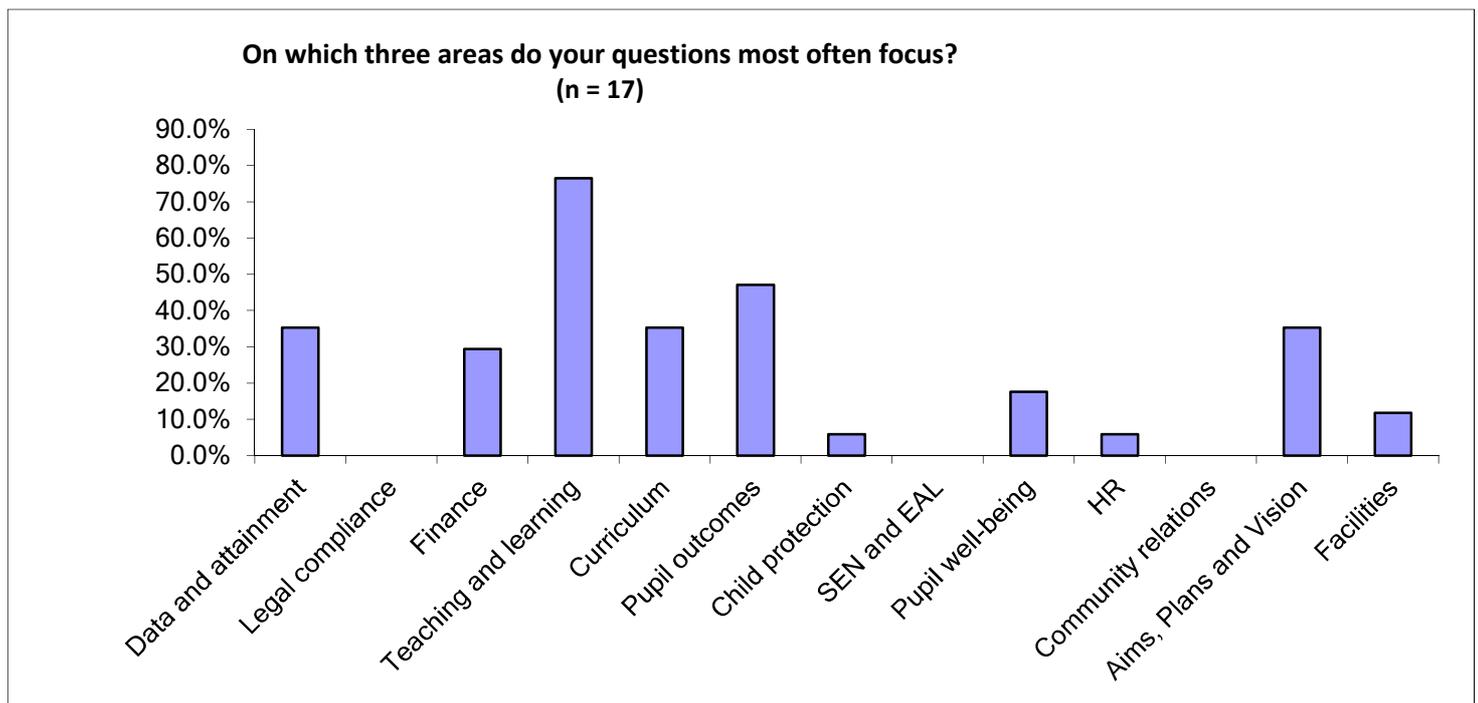
During the observation for the above case study, characteristics of 43 questions were recorded:



The focus of questions observed was on teaching and learning and pupil outcomes. This was reflected in the survey of ambassador governors and in interviews as the following word frequency diagram of respondents’ descriptions of what questions governors should ask shows.



References to targets, outcomes, data and learning are highly prominent in the ambassador governor survey:



As one head put it:

“(questions) need to be focused on outcomes for students. I mean there are no other questions really except outcomes for students” - Head Teacher

This view was echoed by most respondents. There was also a clear link between questions about pupil outcomes and concerns about equity. As one external stakeholder explained, the role of governors is to ask:

“How is the school going to raise standards, not just for some children but for all children so we are talking about the least and the most able here” – Other Stakeholder

Governors are therefore expected to explore barriers to learning to ensure that *all* pupils achieve. They need to ask questions about how teaching provision overcomes barriers. They also need to understand the data that shows what is going on. These two key tasks require governors to be analytical and to have knowledge and understanding of education. We cannot stress strongly enough how important respondents felt it was for governors to interrogate data, to recognise and to precipitate a *“timely”* (other stakeholder) response to under-achievement.

The importance of using data to identify the progress made by different groups is widely recognised. For example, the Governor Mark requires *“Evidence of how information such as the RAISE online report is used and acted upon”* (GLM, 2009).

On this topic, one ambassador governor questioned:

“I wonder if you asked most governors in the country in let’s say a primary school, how are your year 3 girls are doing, or in a secondary school; how did your year 9’s do in history, how many year 10’s are on target to meet their target GCSE grades? I think a relatively small proportion, certainly far smaller than it should be, could actually say this, this, this. And that’s quite worrying and if they can’t do it and they’re not challenging

on those figures, there's not going to be anyone else who is, unless that school is already in intervention or below the floor" – Ambassador Governor

Questions about outcomes also need to link outcomes to inputs. One Head explained that governors:

"should ask questions about the effectiveness of the operations in relation to outcomes." – Head Teacher

An ambassador governor shared this view suggesting that governors should ask:

"how can we make sure that our resources are being used as effectively as they can to benefit the students at the school?" – Ambassador Governor

Challenge

Questioning is linked to being challenging. All respondents regardless of type considered this important. One might expect heads to be wary of challenge but this was absolutely not the case. Of course, one might argue that it is easy for Heads to say this but that they may not mean it whole heartedly. Yet this does not seem to be the case. Firstly, they frequently mentioned governors not being challenging enough as a problem of governance and described the benefits of being challenged:

"If they question more, I have to rehearse more and I have to justify more, which is no bad thing. There is a degree of that relationship becoming complacent and too cosy, and it shouldn't be. So I don't mind that at all." – Head Teacher

"in good and outstanding schools, governors have an important role, I think, in not allowing them to slip and not allowing them to coast. So although they may not be at the forefront of leading school improvement, they are offering a degree of challenge that wouldn't necessarily be there and that's important"

- Head Teacher

Other respondents backed this up by describing Head Teachers who welcomed challenge. In fact, there were no references to Heads being resistant to challenge by Clerks, Chairs of governors or ambassadors.

R: *"...you force them to think a bit harder or think of a wider range of options. I think that's a big part of the role.*

I: ***How does the Head respond to that?***

R: *Very well, really well. They welcome the challenge, I think, as long as you do it in a fair way and a constructive way, I think they like to be challenged. They want the school to be outstanding, they want the school to be as good as it can be"* – Ambassador Governor

Availability of Information

Being challenging plays an important role in avoiding one of the difficulties of governance:

"the amount of data that is available in any school is phenomenal and heads can choose which data they share with governors and which they don't" – Head Teacher

Several other Heads referred to the fact that they had control over what information was presented and insisted that governors need to look beyond the information provided. This was one area where educational expertise or understanding was useful in providing appropriate challenge. As one Head Teacher put it:

"I think the difference would be that they know the questions to ask, that they can see through the bullshit. I think the schools are very good at telling a story of success of glowing victory and things and I think that there needs to be a level of knowledge about some of the things that schools do to make sure they look good"

... I think that generally CEOs, head teachers, the executive function of an organisation always want to tell the governors of that organisation that they are doing a good job. I think that dynamic sometimes means that there is a degree of opaque bullshit that goes on.” – Head Teacher

In effect, this is a structural challenge of governance, it is governors who hold heads to account but Head Teachers who provide them with the information with which to do so. As one ambassador governor put it:

“I mean it’s kind of an inbuilt problem with the whole system like Governors rely on the Head teacher for their information about what’s going on but their job is to hold the head teacher to account about what’s going on so you know there’s it’s kind of (laughter) yeah it’s like you know what I mean there’s a yeah there’s a bit of a tricky, there can be a bit of a tricky situation there. So I guess challenging the Head properly and actually thinking about it rather than just superficially asking him questions and accepting his answers like actually really digging deep into those and understanding what, actually understanding the issues”

– Ambassador governor

Availability of information is particularly important since much of the literature suggests that this is a critical factor in making governing bodies effective (Ofsted 2011, Balarin et al. 2008)

Policy Lesson 4

What questions should governors ask?

10 key questions for governors to ask

1. What are the school's values? Are they reflected in our long term development plans?
2. How are we going to raise standards for all children, including the most and least able, those with Special Educational Needs, boys and girls, and any who are currently underachieving?
3. Have we got the right staff and the right development and reward arrangements?
4. Do we have a sound financial strategy, get good value for money and have robust procurement and financial systems?
5. Do we keep our buildings and other assets in good condition and are they well used?
6. How well does the curriculum provide for and stretch all pupils?
7. How well do we keep parents informed and take account of their views?
8. Do we keep children safe and meet the statutory health and safety requirements?
9. How is pupil behaviour? Do we tackle the root causes of poor behaviour?
10. Do we offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities which engage all pupils?

DfE 2010, pp. 72

The 10 questions recommended in “The Importance of Teaching” (DfE, 2010) were mostly covered by interview respondents and there is some alignment between the results of the survey and these. However the absence of “community relations” and “SEN and EAL” is puzzling. Our research also suggests an emphasis on questions such as 2 and 6 which focus on data and pupil achievement rather than Health and Safety, HR and premises. However, some of “The Importance of Teaching’s” questions could well be covered as contributing factors to pupil outcomes.

The dependence of governing bodies on Heads will hopefully be addressed by plans in the White Paper to make it easier for governors to:

“set high expectations and ask challenging questions, by giving governors easier access to data about how their school compares to others”

- DfE 2010 pp.71

Our research suggests such moves will be very well received.

Engaging and Participating

One of the features that occurred most frequently in respondent's descriptions of good governors was the extent to which they engaged and participated. In some cases this referred to participating in meetings by asking questions and expressing opinions. Indeed many respondents were highly critical of governors who *"kind of turn up and sit and ..."* (Ambassador governor).

Attending and getting involved in meetings are therefore a core minimum. This may sound so obvious that it appears glib, but it was a frequently stated concern and several respondents began their response to "what are the differences between effective and ineffective governors" or "what makes a good governor" with responses like *"You've actually got to want to do it and you know turn up to meetings."* (Ambassador governor)

Beyond this, many respondents talked about the importance of governors engaging in the school outside of governors' meetings. The degree of such participation varied with some describing governors coming to awards evenings and on trips and others talking about programs of lesson observations.

"I mean it's important that governors get into schools as much as they can. We are not inspectors where they are just to take an objective view so we may decide to go into assemblies, we may go into some lessons, we may do some, you know, wouldn't say observations, you know, sitting in on the lesson and looking at how the lessons go and then reporting back to the Head afterwards. We just do a short visit, and also going into the, you know, the performances that the school does. You know, you can pick a lot up through those types of things, certainly on performances because you then get an opportunity to engage with the parents."

- Chair of governors

The level of governor participation outside of meetings will depend on the type of governing body and on school level decisions. Earley (2000) notes that:

"Where visiting did take place, particularly if it was on a formal basis (as in one of the case-study schools) a great deal of thinking and preparation had to precede the visits in order that there could be a sense of trust between the school and the governors, and that the maximum benefit was derived from the visit. Most of the governing bodies had devised general guidelines for school visits, in recognition of their importance to both governors and teachers" (pp.202)

There were examples of observations going well but also of some difficulties:

"But, the counter to that was, that the teachers felt upset about it... So, that was the hard bit and they thought we were being critical, too over critical and over ... some accept it, but some didn't. However, that's good for the school." - Chair of governors

Being Strategic

"There will be some (governing bodies) where the colours of tiles in the showers will be the major talking point when actually it's got sod all to do with the governors." – Other stakeholder

Most respondents were 'on message' about being strategic. However there was some evidence that even respondents who felt they were strategic were perhaps less so than they thought. Some, for example praised governors who focused on pet projects like debating clubs which did not seem particularly strategic and one ambassador governor said their board was:

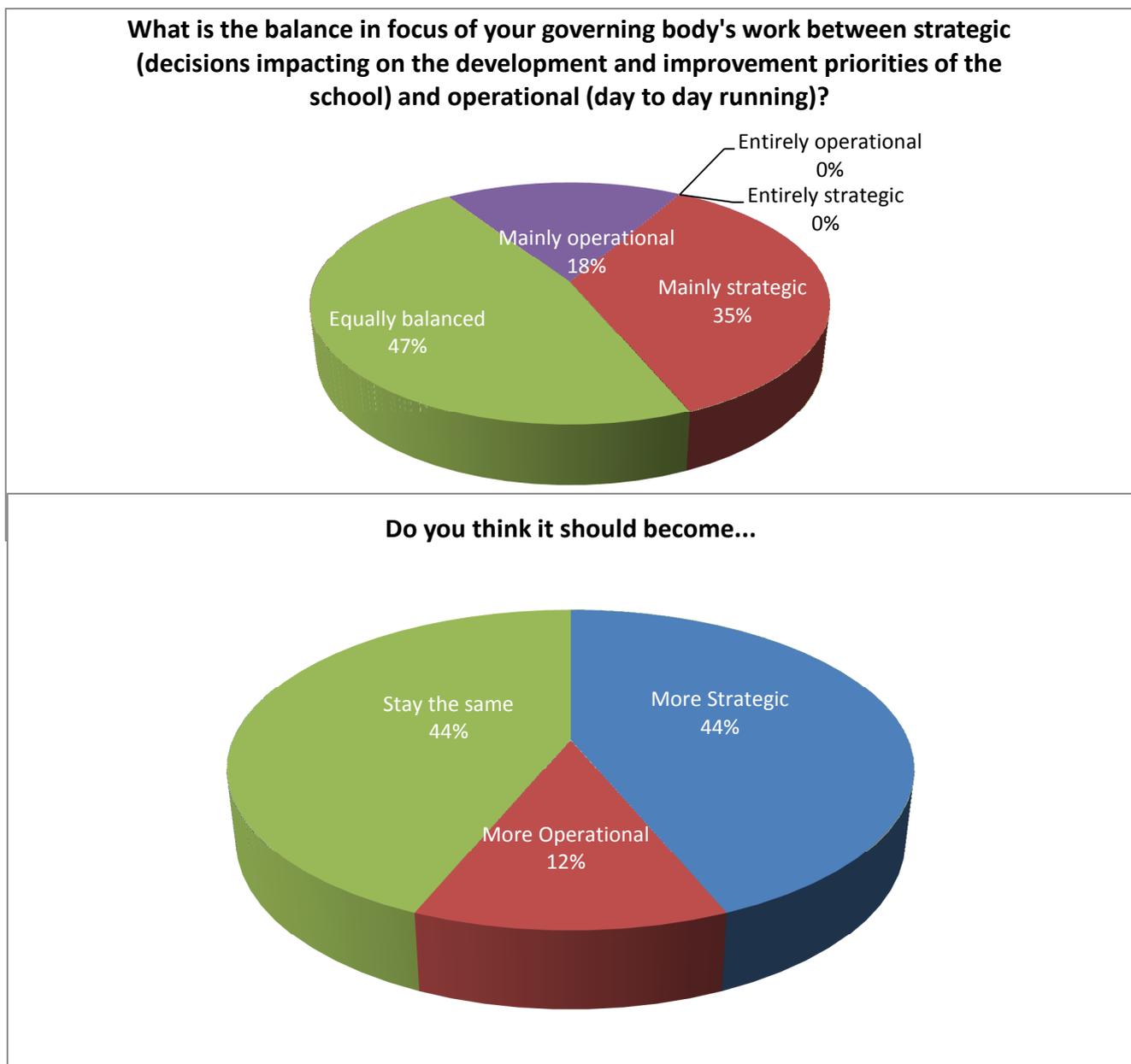
"Quite well split. So I'd say there's around half the governing body who tend to spent a lot of time in the school and help on a day to day basis or a week to week basis, that often we have on our trips, helping with various events, fundraising events. And the other half tend to play a more strategic role"

- Ambassador Governor

He justified this surprisingly operational-heavy split on the grounds that there were eight highly strategic governors and that with a large board they could afford to have some more operational governors. He recognised that this could be a problem if strategic governors left.

Few respondents gave examples of setting the school’s overall vision or strategy. This echoes the findings of Farrell (2005) quoted in James et al. (2010, pp.21). Where deep strategic thinking about the future direction of the school had taken place it was invariably linked to periods of significant change. In one case it was a boys’ and girls’ school coming together on one site, in several it was due to a new building and in others it was linked to discussions about whether or not to go for academy status. Respondents also linked setting the vision for the school to appointing a new Head Teacher who would be picked because they reflected their vision. For several, the appointment of the head was the most important thing governors ever did.

The “mainly strategic” consensus in interviews contrasts with responses from the ambassador governor survey.



It is surprising that although 65% considered their board either “equally balanced” or “mainly operational”, only about 44% thought their board needed to be more strategic.

Policy Lesson 5

The Strategic Role of Governors

The White Paper on Education states:

“We will work with the National Governors Association and others to clarify governing body accountabilities and responsibilities to focus more strongly on strategic direction” - DfE, 2010 pp. 7

Our research suggests that although the message about needing to be strategic has got through, practice on the ground is still mixed. Further direction could therefore be useful. On the other hand, some respondents saw value in some operational involvement since operational issue like poor lunchtime routines can quickly lead to poor behaviour which may escalate and become a more strategic issue.

Parents were frequently criticised for being overly operational. This leads to what we call ‘the paradox of parents’.

Policy Lesson 6

The paradox of parents

Carmichael and Wild (2011) argue that:

“parents may sometimes wish to steer the agenda towards matters of immediate concern and away from the more strategic parts of an agenda” –pp.18

Our research corroborates this argument, suggesting that parents were the prime culprits of an operational or particularist focus. They frequently looked after their child’s interest or a particular experience of a ‘bad lunch last week.’ This problem was widely discussed:

Similarly, James et al. (2010) report that:

“The perspective of parent governors could be problematic with some joining the governing body with a narrow interest in their own child’s education. As the head teacher at S13 put it: “One governor can only see his daughter”... There was evidence in one school that having a high proportion of parents on the governing body can be problematic. At P8 the clerk to the governing body felt that a “high proportion of parents” had in the past hindered the work of the governing body.” –pp. 39

Some of our respondents had also had problems with parent governors:

“we have had to sort of ask a governor in the past to stand down because with a new parent governor and basically her child was sort of fairly disengaged and she just thought the fact that she was a governor gave her kind of an autonomy to come in and challenge every decision that the school was making”

- Chair of Governors

They are: “often motivated by a single issue, that single issue being their child. And you don’t always get them viewing the whole job of governorship in the round” – Head teacher

Carmichael and Wild (2010) argue that:

“We did not find any evidence to demonstrate the benefits of a fixed number of governors who are parents of pupils within a school, nor did we see a board without current parents as being in any way less effective than one with a number of them” –pp.15

A real paradox therefore arises given that we have already seen that parents are some of the most valued governors but also the least effective. Whilst they lend “legitimacy and authenticity” (Chair of governors) they also contribute to particularism and operationalism.

In some cases, respondents said they had escaped this paradox by training parents or by directly approaching those who were most ‘suitable’. If this approach is successful then given that “The Importance of Teaching” (DfE 2010) maintains a commitment to at least two parent governors, perhaps it should be reproduced across the board.

'Leadership of Governors'

We have already seen in both of our case studies how important it is for governing bodies to be decisive and how particular governors have taken a leadership role in order to make these decisions. Carmichael and Wild (2011) emphasise the importance of this in saying:

"Failing boards may have an even more detrimental impact on schools than failing teachers by their inability or unwillingness to take decisive action" – p19

This is one example of what we shall call 'leadership of governors'. 'Leadership of governors' also played a role in ensuring boards remained strategic. Several Chairs of governors and Head Teachers described their role in fulfilling this function:

"Well they don't (get involved in operational issues) because they shouldn't and if they ever try, I make sure that they, in the nicest possible way, knew that that actually wasn't their job." – Head Teacher

This Head (of an 'Outstanding' school) exemplified 'leadership of governors'. Because she is committed to involving parents who might find it difficult otherwise, she sees part of her role as supporting the governing body with the fact that they are a "mixed ability group". She therefore shares information effectively and accessibly:

"part of my role is giving information. So I will sometimes at governing body meetings give presentations to update them on current issues and what the implications might be for schools and for governors because they need to keep abreast but we've got to make it easy for them to actually keep abreast because it's not the easiest thing in the world." – Head Teacher

She also works hard to structure meetings appropriately by organising small group sessions in meetings so that governors feel more comfortable asking questions and sharing their views.

Leadership of governors was also important in ensuring that governors were appropriately trained. One Chair of Governors said:

"I have worked with our clerk, (Name) who works for the LEA and Governor Services, so we make sure that the governors have had the, you know, the training, the correct training, if they are least effective in a certain area, perhaps having a discussion with them and saying, "Look, have you seen the training programme? Is there anything else you think you would like to do, you know, is there anything that you think you have sort of an experience gap, you know, is there any way we can help you do that" - Chair of governors

Both of our earlier case studies revealed the need for leadership of governors in crisis situations. This makes leadership of governors particularly relevant to schools in challenging circumstances.

Policy Lesson 7

Developing the skills of Chairs and Clerks

The White Paper on Education pledges to develop the expertise of Clerks and Chairs of governors. (DfE, 2010 pp. 71). This could be very useful in providing the leadership of governors which is clearly so beneficial to governing bodies. The move is backed up by Balarin et al's research which suggests that Clerk's contributions are strongest on effective governing bodies. (2008) .

This policy should be welcomed given that one of the best examples of leadership of governors came from a Head Teacher who recognised the problems that might ensue where Heads do not perform the leadership role as effectively. It also brings us back to the earlier issue of governors being dependent on information from Head Teachers. If Clerks and Chairs of Governors were well informed and capable this would be less of a problem. Most of our research revealed Clerks and Chairs who were well equipped but at least one ambassador governor interview suggested that this was not always the case.

Providing support

As well as challenge, governors were also valued for the support they offered. This could range from supporting new initiatives, making suggestions about teaching and learning or helping to raise funds through links to professional networks.

Despite the fact that respondents described examples of supporting the school this was not the bulk of their work in contradiction to the findings of Dean et al. (2007) quoted in James et al. (2010) who argue that:

Governors *“felt happier offering support rather than challenge, and relied on heads to set strategic direction for the school”* (James et al. 2010, pp. 21).

Part 3: Governor Recruitment

'Shortages' or 'vacancies'

Shortages of governors did not appear to be a particularly big concern. Instead, concerns were focused on the challenges of representation. One external stakeholder went so far as to say:

"I don't think it's hard to recruit them, placing them is difficult. The placing is a bigger issue for us than recruiting... because unless we can place them within a reasonable space of time they get fed up, they walk away, they may take their company with them and they probably never come back to volunteering again."

-Other stakeholder

Even respondents in some of the most challenging circumstances did not seem particularly concerned about recruitment.

"I could literally have another 10 governors on there right now. But I'm being selective." - Chair of governors

That said, the majority of respondents had some vacancies but this did not necessarily equate to a shortage. This was well expressed by the Clerk and Head of a school in an academy chain.

"We have some vacancies spread across the network although we don't sort of regard them as shortages at this level of our development in governance because we can have up to 15 members on each governing body, but we start small and grow. So in some of newer academies we haven't got our 15 but we don't sort of say, "Oh gosh we've got a lot of vacancies" we just say you know we're in a growth situation... I do think that one of the issues that we have in certain areas is how to recruit ethnic minority representation. "

- Clerk

"I wouldn't say 'shortages'... The gap we have at the moment would be more around connection with the local community" - Head Teacher

Only one respondent described overall shortages in genuinely problematic terms (although they still linked this back to types of governors):

I: ... are you currently experiencing a shortage of governors?

R: *Never not...Community governors mainly, in terms of some of the ... we recruit them from the local authority and community. Parents used to be, but not so significantly now. Far more interest from ... as we have grown closer to the parents, and we have encouraged more parental involvement, it becomes less ... it has become less problematic to recruit parents in fact. I'm actually holding elections now. So previously, I never used to. But it's those other places on the governing body that I can wait months and months and months to fill."* Head Teacher

Nonetheless, there is no question that there are a huge number of vacancies nationally. Bowen (2007) puts the level at 11%. Balarin et. al (2008) suggest a possible explanation to the surprising lack of "shortage" described by our respondents. They show that even governing bodies with 25% of places vacant at the end of one term may have none by the end of the next. They suggest that the number of schools experiencing persistent vacancies is nearer 2-3%. However they report that 45.1% of governors describe finding willing governors with the right skills very challenging. More can be found on this in James et al. (2010 pp. 15.)

The nature of vacancies

The SGOSS data allows us to go into more depth about where vacancies are concentrated and whether there are any differences between Teach First eligible and non-Teach First eligible schools.

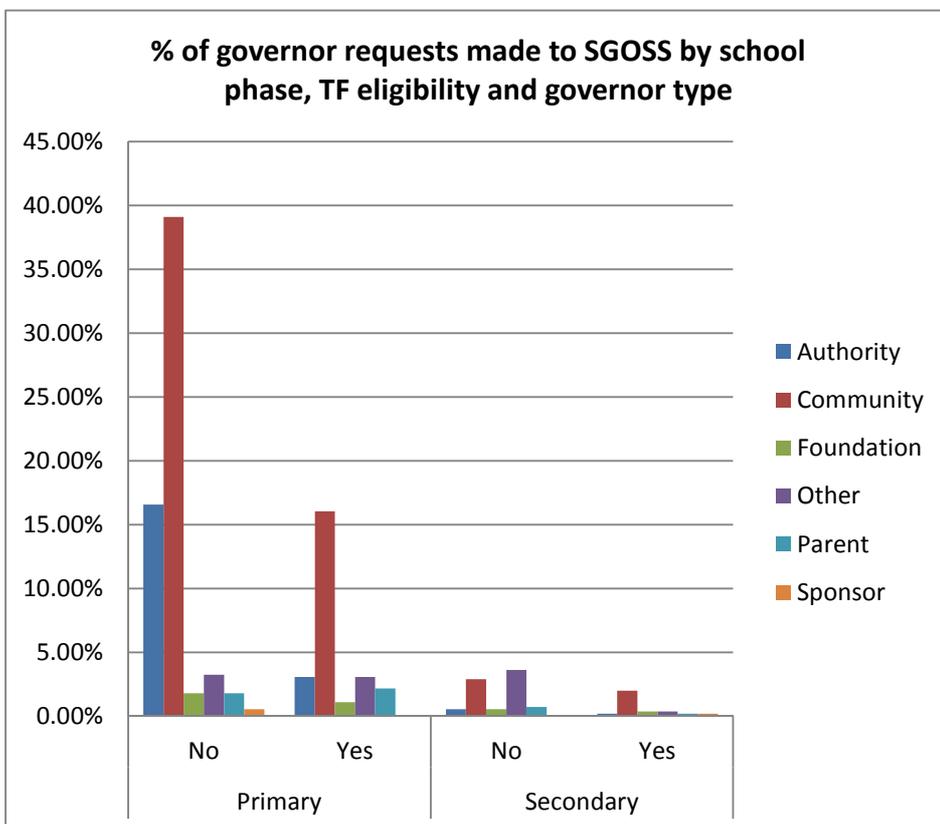
Location

The highest numbers of vacancies reported to SGOSS were in Hertfordshire, Hampshire, Kent, Surrey and West Sussex. Of course this does not mean this is where there are most vacancies nationally as numbers may be linked to SGOSS’ profile and connections. Teach First is not yet operating in these areas since there is a lower concentration of eligible schools. 24 Local Authorities reported 3 or more vacancies in Teach First eligible schools. The majority were located in London.

School Type

More of the requests made to SGOSS were for primary school governors than secondary and this was the case for both Teach First eligible and non-Teach First eligible schools.

| Local Authority | Number of vacancies in Teach First eligible schools |
|----------------------|---|
| Camden | 8 |
| Hillingdon | 7 |
| Waltham Forest | 7 |
| Kent | 7 |
| Manchester | 6 |
| Cambridgeshire | 5 |
| Northamptonshire | 5 |
| Ealing | 5 |
| Hackney | 5 |
| Lambeth | 5 |
| Haringey | 4 |
| Enfield | 4 |
| Reading | 4 |
| Hertfordshire | 4 |
| Lewisham | 4 |
| Newham | 3 |
| Birmingham | 3 |
| Bristol | 3 |
| Staffordshire | 3 |
| Croydon | 3 |
| Kensington & Chelsea | 3 |
| Salford | 3 |
| Bromley | 3 |
| Peterborough | 3 |

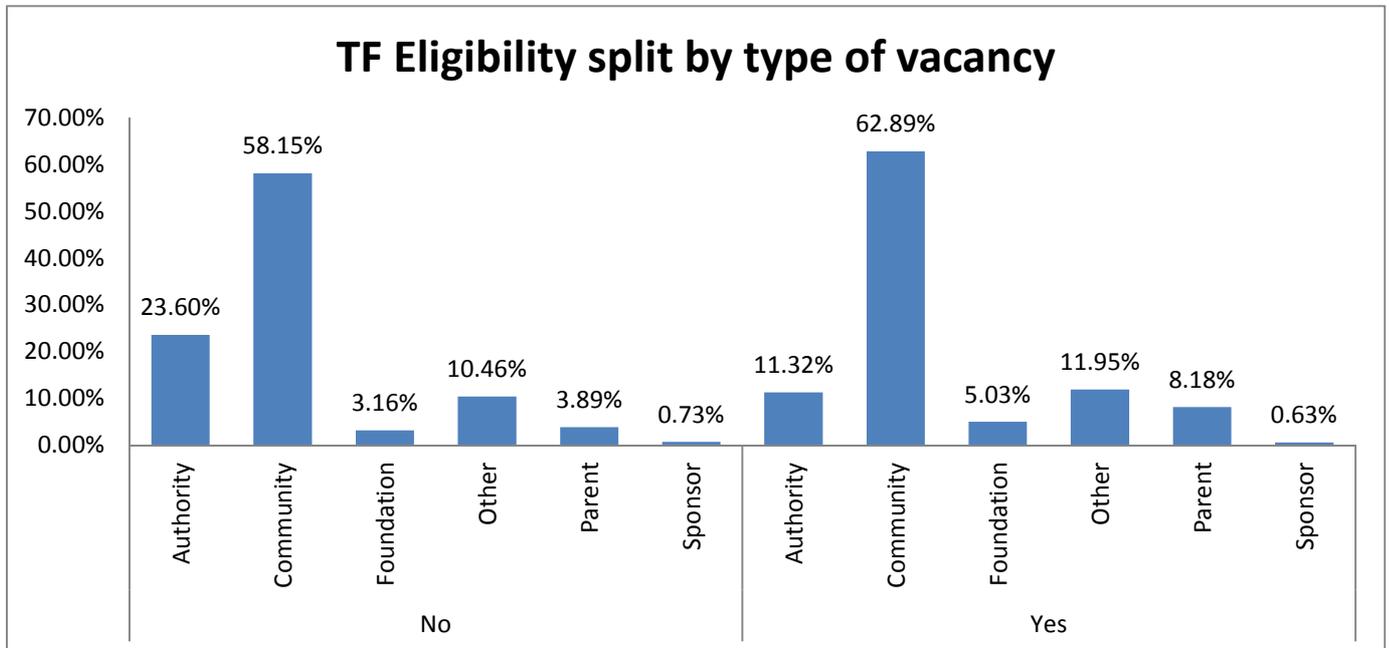


This confirmed the view of an external stakeholder who commented:

“Secondary is easier to fill than primary...there is a conception issue there that we have with primary schools and secondary schools that volunteer governors tend to think that the role is more substantial at secondary school” – External stakeholder

Types of shortages

The most common type of vacancy in both Teach First eligible and non-Teach First eligible was for community governors. Teach First eligible schools' vacancies were less likely to be for local authority governors and more likely to be for parent and community governors. This chimes very closely with the evidence that emerged from interviews and is also backed up by James et al's research which shows that schools in disadvantaged areas were less likely to have contested elections for parent governors (James et al. 2010 pp. 46.)



Interview respondents made it clear that achieving a representative governing body was a big issue:

“There is a real deficit in terms of parent Governors, we are really really struggling to get them or to keep them.”

- Ambassador Governor

For many, there was a link between socio-economic deprivation or foreign language communities and difficulties in recruiting parent and community governors.

“ it was quite difficult to get, you know, this was from quite a disadvantaged area in (area name)... and it was difficult to get parents, you know, it was difficult enough sometimes to get parents to come into the school during the day to discuss aspects of their child's work or their behaviour. You then had to challenge to try and get them in on an evening, you know.”

- Chair of governors

“Which are hardest to recruit? I would say the parent ones, the parent governors.” - Clerk

“I think it's difficult to recruit from outside groups that look like me and you at times, because overwhelmingly the group looks like me and you and it can be quite intimidating. So there's language barriers, there's cultural barriers that need to be overcome... It's a difficult one because actually who should really be on your governing body? All the people that live around here. Your community should be on your governing body; this should be the focal point of your community.... traditionally in schools like ours it's the most difficult to recruit the parents.”

- Head Teacher

The difficulty of recruiting some types of governors might lead to an argument for changing the stakeholder model, but as 'Policy Lesson 1' indicated, this would be unpopular. As the above quote indicates, the reason respondents

want parents or local people on their governing body is not because of policy prescription but because they genuinely believe that it is the right thing to do.

“If part of the skills and experience you’re looking for is someone that understands the student body and the local community and can relate to parents, you’re not going to find someone who can do that better than a parent at the school. And so in order to get the right balance of skills you also need the right balance of background I think.” - Ambassador Governor

Three schools described current or previous difficulties with recruiting the governors with the business background they wanted:

“in my previous experience at my previous school we tended to have greater ease in attracting parent governors and teacher governors than local business people.” - Head Teacher

“I think people with maybe in from higher education and business governors at an appropriate senior level are, probably have been the hardest to find in the past.” - Head Teacher

“So I would like to see a model which would encourage more people from those (Finance and HR) kinds of sectors, but I think we need to be realistic as well with 17,000 primary, 3,000 secondary schools, there’s only a certain finite number of those people” – Ambassador Governor

One external stakeholder linked this difficulty to socio-economic disadvantage:

“Obviously in disadvantaged areas it’s difficult to attract governors and more work needs to be done particularly I think from the business community.” – Other stakeholder

This links to the idea of “governance capital” explored by James et al. (2011) and may suggest that Teach First eligible schools are more likely to face difficulties in recruiting governors with experience and expertise.

Part 4: Conclusion and governor profiles

We conclude by drawing together profiles of the four ‘types’ of governors whom our research suggests are most valuable and appreciated by schools. Our research suggests that different schools have different approaches to governance which can all be appropriate in different settings. Our four profiles therefore recognise that different governors will be valuable and appreciated in different settings.

‘The Forensic’

“They can look at it.... in that forensic detail, you know, they can look and pick up things that other governors might not” – Chair of Governors

‘The Forensic’ is the most desired type of governor. They provide the classic “critical friend” input. They place strategic decisions under the microscope by applying their analytical skill and using their ability to communicate clearly, confidently and diplomatically in order to ask challenging questions. They can look at information and select the most pertinent and significant details. Because they have leadership skills they are willing to be decisive and make tough decisions. They build strong boards that help Heads feel secure that the decisions made are right for the school. Heads welcome forensic governors because they embed ambition by always expecting them to improve. The key for the forensic governor is to strike the right balance between challenge and support.

‘The Forensic’ brings:

- Rapid and focused information processing
- Analytical skill
- Inquisitiveness
- The emotional intelligence to challenge diplomatically
- Clear communication and deep questioning
- Leadership

‘The Local’

“I know this area, I like this area, I live in this area so I think that’s important as well... you know the community to a certain extent that you also I don’t know, you want it to do well. Well I mean you know I live here and I want the schools here to be good” - Ambassador governor

The local governor has a deep link with the school’s area. They may live there or work there but either way, they have a deep understanding of issues in the community and care passionately about the future of the schools within it. This means that they are champions for the school’s pupils and understand the barriers to learning they may face. In meetings they look at the reasons why things might be happening but see those reason as pointers towards solutions rather than as excuses.

‘The Local’ brings:

- Passion
- Understanding
- High expectations

'The Expert'

"I think having individual governors with specific skills is important. So for example I think it's important to have someone on the governing board who's got an insight into finance" – Chair of Governors

Some schools want an "expertise based" board of governors. Expert governors provide high level input into decisions that require specialist knowledge. They use their background to ask pertinent questions in discussions which relate to their area of expertise and join relevant committees. They act as a sounding board for Heads but need to avoid acting as pro-bono consultants and offering professional advice. They should also bear in mind that they are all collectively responsible and must therefore be able to act as "generalists" as well as specialists. Primary schools are perhaps most likely to welcome expert governors.

Expertise based boards are sometimes referred to as "skills based" but skills can also refer to competencies so the two are treated separately here.

'The Expert' might bring an understanding of:

- HR
- Finance
- Buildings and Premises
- Law
- Marketing
- Strategy
- Project Management

'The Educationalist'

"I think I've been able to interpret and question the educational information and data and read that more clearly." – Ambassador Governor

The educationalist brings an understanding of school data, a picture of what a school could or should look like and the context in which schools operate. This means that they can ask relevant questions about the information they are provided with and even beyond that by asking for extra information. Their understanding brings meaning to the picture that is presented. For example, they can picture what "two sub-levels of progress" really mean and why it matters. They are empathetic because they know how challenging schools can be. They sometimes bring ideas with them and are therefore able to make relevant suggestions and share good practice. However, in so doing they must avoid the temptation to be drawn into operational discussions.

'The Educationalist' brings:

- A detailed understanding of data
- Knowledge of the changing educational landscape
- High expectations

Our research has left us in no doubt about the incredible importance and value of good governance. We found numerous cases where actions by governors led to school transformation or where governors' steady hand on the tiller was crucial in steering schools through periods of transition and turmoil.

In order to fulfil their crucial role successfully, governing bodies need to bring together governors with a rich mix of competencies and dispositions, experience and expertise and representation. Governors need to be highly motivated and display the behaviours most conducive to effective governance. These include the right balance of support, challenging questioning and leadership, which in turn should remain focused on pupil outcomes. Whilst background may influence governors' ability to act effectively, the way they carry out the business of governing ultimately trumps other concerns.

Current policy changes offer an opportunity to move in this direction. The move towards developing skilled chairs and clerks is to be welcomed, as is the renewed focus on strategic concerns and quality questioning. The lack of prescription in structural changes to size and stakeholder requirements is also to be welcomed since even outstanding schools pursue different models of governance and have different needs and visions for their governing bodies. There remain areas which need further exploration and elucidation: it is unclear to what extent moves towards academisation, marketization and autonomy will impact on governing bodies. A significant question mark also remains over how best to leverage the important contribution of parents; they remain a prime stakeholder with a unique contribution to make but frequently fail to achieve their potential. Some of the best schools find ways to respond to this and their models for doing so should be explored further and replicated.

Overall, the importance of good governance needs to be much more widely recognised and there should be no question as to what a skilled business good governance is.

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Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview questions:

Interviews with Chairs of Governors/Clerks – Discussion Guide

Aims:

1. To identify what makes a good governor- including the differences between effective and ineffective governors
2. To understand to what extent governors are able to impact on pupil outcomes and what would help them to do so more
3. To identify any perceived skills gaps and barriers to recruitment
4. To explore attitudes to current policy changes

The following is intended to be a starting point for discussion and key ground to cover rather than an exhaustive list of questions. Elaborations should be elicited, interesting points followed up and root causes identified using a “5 Why’s” approach (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys) where appropriate.

Part 1: Good governors

1. What are the most important characteristics of good governors? (*Why...*)
2. In an ideal world, explain how good governors would best help your school to improve?
3. Considering your most effective and least effective governors- what makes them different?
4. To what extent do your governors focus on particular areas in which they have expertise cf. being generalists. How would you prefer it to be?
5. How useful is experience of working in a challenging school to a governor? (*Why..., What difference does it make*)
6. Do you notice any differences in the way Ambassador governors and others operate?

Part 2: Governance and outcomes

1. Describe the impact of good governors? (*Why is this important... , What enables them to achieve this...*)
2. What sort of questions do you think governors should ask? (*type or area of focus*)
3. To what extent do your governors have a shared view of what they want pupils/school to achieve? (*Prompt Exam results, an ethos or culture, developmental etc.*) How do they reflect this in the way they work?
4. What skills would help a governor to focus their contribution more on raising pupil outcomes?

Part 3: Skills gaps and barriers

1. Are you currently experiencing a shortage of governors? or types? (*expertise/skills/representation*)
2. What areas of skills/expertise do you think you are currently missing?
3. What types of governors are hardest to find?
4. Is it easy or hard to recruit good quality governors?
5. How do you go about recruiting governors?
6. When deciding whether to appoint a governor what are the most important things you take into account?
7. In what areas would you most appreciate support from governors? (*Why...*)

Part 4: Attitudes to Current Policy Changes

1. What do you think is the ideal size of governor board for your school? (Is the number they give linked to the size of their school?)
2. When looking for governors are you looking for particular expertise, skills, behaviours or for representatives of particular groups?

3. If the education bill currently passing through parliament does allow governing bodies to change their structure to be based more on skills than on representation, do you think you would consider changing the make-up of your governing body? How and Why?
4. What are the benefits (if any) of having different groups represented on the board? (e.g. teachers, parents, local authority etc.) Will you continue to seek representatives from these groups?
5. To what extent have governors been involved in setting and overseeing school strategy in the past? Do you think this will change?
6. What equips a governor to play a strategic role in the school?
7. How involved are your governors in operational management of the school? (How useful is this? Do you think it will change?)
8. Do you think a less prescriptive environment (without SIPs, SEFs etc.) will alter the role of governing bodies (how? *prompt- if the school is more autonomous in its decisions about education, will more education experience be needed?*), Will this impact on the types of governors you recruit?
9. Have you considered or would you ever consider outsourcing functions of the governing body to professional organisations (e.g. a professional exclusion panel)? What do you think the implications of doing this would be?
10. How prepared do you feel your school is to deal with an increasing market in education? (*prompt e.g. the need to measure impact, demonstrate outcomes and to communicate this to the public in a competitive environment*) Do you expect governors to be involved in this? Would governors be well placed to offer guidance on this?
11. Is there anything that gets in the way of creating effective governing bodies?

Note

Please record:

- Data on school size, results etc. in all of the additional information columns of the school sample spreadsheet
- All available details of the governing body- (number of parent/teacher/LA/faith group representatives)
- Contacts details for Chair of Governors, Teach First Ambassador Governors and any other appropriate contacts

Interviews with Ambassador Governors – Discussion Guide

Aims:

1. To identify what makes a good governor- including the differences between effective and ineffective governors
2. To understand to what extent governors are able to impact on pupil outcomes and what would help them to do so more
3. To identify any perceived skills gaps and barriers to recruitment
4. To explore attitudes to current policy changes

The following is intended to be a starting point for discussion and key ground to cover rather than an exhaustive list of questions. Elaborations should be elicited, interesting points followed up and root causes identified using a “5 Why’s” approach (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys) where appropriate.

- How long have you been a governor?
- How many governors are on your governing body? Do you think this is too many, not enough or just right? Why? Relationship to size of school?

- What should be the main things taken into consideration when recruiting governors? (*Experience of working in schools, Experience of working in different sectors, Knowledge and understanding of education, skills, Representation of different groups*)
- What qualities, experiences or skills do you think make someone a good governor?
- What are the main differences between effective and ineffective governors?
- What are the main skills or qualities that you bring to your role as a governor? *Why are those useful?*
- In what ways does your background as a Teach First teacher or teacher in a school in challenging circumstances help you fulfil your role as a governor?
- What are the challenges you face in becoming an effective governor?
- Are there any particular areas you tend to focus your work in? (*e.g. areas your questions focus on or committees you sit on*)
- What types of questions do you find most useful to ask?
- Is this the same or different to other governors? *In what way?*
- What do you do as a governor which helps improve outcomes for pupils? *How do you know that this is the case?*
- What is the balance between strategic and operational focus in the work of your governing body? *Do you think that the balance is right? Why?*
- Describe an example or case study of governors exercising what you would consider “good governance?” (*What did they do? What happened as a result? Why is that an example of good governance?*)
- Is there anything that gets in the way of creating effective governing bodies?

Interviews with Heads – Discussion Guide

Aims:

1. To identify what makes a good governor- including the differences between effective and ineffective governors
2. To understand to what extent governors are able to impact on pupil outcomes and what would help them to do so more
3. To identify any perceived skills gaps and barriers to recruitment
4. To explore attitudes to current policy changes

The following is intended to be a starting point for discussion and key ground to cover rather than an exhaustive list of questions. Elaborations should be elicited, interesting points followed up and root causes identified using a “5 Why’s” approach (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys) where appropriate.

Part 1: Good governors

1. What are the most important characteristics of good governors? (*Why...*)
2. In an ideal world, explain how good governors would best help your school to improve?
3. Considering your most effective and least effective governors- what makes them different?
4. To what extent do your governors focus on particular areas in which they have expertise cf. being generalists. How would you prefer it to be?
5. How useful is experience of working in a challenging school to a governor? (*Why..., What difference does it make*)
6. (Do you notice any differences in the way Ambassador governors and others operate?)

Part 2: Governance and outcomes

1. Describe the impact of good governors? (*Why is this important... , What enables them to achieve this...*)
2. What sort of questions do you think governors should ask? (*type or area of focus*)
3. To what extent do your governors have a shared view of what they want pupils/school to achieve? (*Prompt Exam results, an ethos or culture, developmental etc.*) How do they reflect this in the way they work?
4. What skills/expertise/behaviours would help a governor to focus their contribution more on raising pupil outcomes?

Part 3: Skills gaps and barriers

8. What is the make-up of your board of governors?
9. Are you currently experiencing a shortage of governors? or types? (*expertise/skills/representation*)
10. Is it easy or hard to recruit good quality governors?
11. What types of governors are hardest to find?
12. How do you go about recruiting governors?
13. When deciding whether to appoint a governor what are the most important things you take into account?
14. In what areas would you most appreciate support from governors? (*Why...*)

Part 4: Attitudes to Current Policy Changes

1. What do you think is the ideal size for a board of governors in your school? (*Is the number they give linked to the size of their school?*)
2. When looking for governors are you looking for particular expertise, skills, behaviours or for representatives of particular groups?
3. If the education bill currently passing through parliament does allow governing bodies to change their structure to be based more on skills than on representation, do you think you would consider changing the make-up of your governing body? *How and Why?*
4. What are the benefits (if any) of having different groups represented on the board? (e.g. teachers, parents, local authority etc.) Will you continue to seek representatives from these groups?
5. To what extent have governors been involved in setting and overseeing school strategy in the past? Do you think this will change?
6. What equips a governor to play a strategic role in the school?
7. How involved are your governors in operational management of the school? (*How useful is this? Do you think it will change?*)
8. Do you think a less prescriptive environment (without SIPs, SEFs etc.) will alter the role of governing bodies (*how? prompt- if the school is more autonomous in its decisions about education, will more education experience be needed?*), Will this impact on the types of governors you recruit?
9. Have you considered or would you ever consider outsourcing functions of the governing body to professional organisations (*e.g. a professional exclusion panel*)? What do you think the implications of doing this would be?
10. How prepared do you feel your school is to deal with an increasing market in education? (*prompt e.g. the need to measure impact, demonstrate outcomes and to communicate this to the public in a competitive environment*) Do you expect governors to be involved in this? Would their guidance be helpful? What skills would they need to do this?
11. Is there anything that gets in the way of creating effective governing bodies?

Note

Please record:

- Data on school size, results etc. in all of the additional information columns of the school sample spreadsheet
- All available details of the governing body- (number of parent/teacher/LA/faith group representatives)
- Contacts details for Chair of Governors, Teach First Ambassador Governors and any other appropriate contacts

Interviews with other stakeholders

Aims:

1. To identify what makes a good governor- including the differences between effective and ineffective governors
2. To understand to what extent governors are able to impact on pupil outcomes and what would help them to do so more
3. To identify any perceived skills gaps and barriers to recruitment
4. To explore attitudes to current policy changes

The following is intended to be a starting point for discussion and key ground to cover rather than an exhaustive list of questions. Elaborations should be elicited, interesting points followed up and root causes identified using a “5 Why’s” approach (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/5_Whys) where appropriate.

Part 1: Good governors

1. What are the most important characteristics of good governors? (*Why...*)
2. In an ideal world, explain how good governors would best help schools to improve?
3. Considering the most effective and least effective governors- what makes them different?
4. Do you think governors should be generalists or focus on particular areas in which they have experience?
5. How useful is experience of working in a challenging school to a governor? (*Why..., What difference does it make*)

Part 2: Governance and outcomes

1. Describe the impact of good governors? (*Why is this important... , What enables them to achieve this...*)
2. What sort of questions do you think governors should ask? (*type or area of focus*)
3. What skills/expertise/behaviours would help a governor to focus their contribution more on raising pupil outcomes?

Part 3: Skills gaps and barriers

1. How many seeking/placed, types etc.
2. Do you think there is a shortage of governors with a particular area of expertise/skill/representation?
3. Is it easy or hard to recruit good quality governors?
4. How do the schools you work with go about recruiting governors?
5. When deciding whether a governor should be placed in a school, what are the most important things you take into account?
6. In what areas do you think Head Teachers/Schools most appreciate support from governors? (*Why...*)

Part 4: Attitudes to Current Policy Changes

1. What do you think is the ideal size for a governing body? (*Is the number they give linked to the size of their school?*)
2. What is the relative value of recruiting governors for their particular experiences/ skills/representation of a group?
3. If the education bill currently passing through parliament allows governing bodies to change their structure to be based more on skills than on representation, do you think the schools you work with are likely to change the make-up of their governing bodies? *How and Why? Do you think they should/would you do so in their position?*

4. What are the benefits (if any) of having different groups represented on the board? (e.g. teachers, parents, local authority etc.)
5. How involved are governors setting and overseeing schools' strategies? Do you think this will change?
6. What equips a governor to play a strategic role in the school?
7. How involved do you think governors get in the operational management of schools? (*How useful is this? Do you think it will change?*)
8. Do you think a less prescriptive environment (without SIPs, SEFs etc.) will alter the role of governing bodies (how? *prompt- if the school is more autonomous in its decisions about education, will more education experience be needed?*), Will this impact on the types of governors schools recruit?
9. Are you aware of schools outsourcing or considering outsourcing functions of their governing bodies to professional organisations (*e.g. a professional exclusion panel*)? What do you think the implications of doing this would/will be?
10. How prepared do you feel schools are to deal with an increasing market in education? (*prompt e.g. the need to measure impact, demonstrate outcomes and to communicate this to the public in a competitive environment*) Do you expect governors to be involved in this? Would their guidance be helpful? What skills would they need?
11. Is there anything that gets in the way of creating effective governing bodies?

Note

Please record:

- *Number of vacancies, average time to fill*
- *Process of recruitment*

Appendix 2

School Characteristic Methodology

Size band: Schools were ranked into groups from 1 – 5 using the 20% size band boundaries for "Pupils on Roll" from the relevant 2010 RaiseOnline with 1 representing the largest schools.

SEN band: Schools were ranked into groups from 1 - 5 (5 being 0 - 20%, 1 being 80 - 100%) using the 20% band boundaries for "SEN (including SA, SA+ and Statements)" from the relevant 2010 RaiseOnline.

Attainment Band: The measures for 5A*-C including English and Maths and 5A*-C have been compared to the national average, where a school has achieved or exceeded the national average they have been given a score of 1. The sum of the two scores (+1) groups the schools. 1 is where the school is classed as not having achieved either attainment measure, 2 is where the school has achieved one, 3 is where the school has achieved both. To aide comparability to Ofsted grades where 1 is highest, grades were then inverted so that a performance grade of 3 was converted to a 1 and vice versa.

Progress Band: The measures for percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and Maths have been compared to the national average. For each school, where the national average has been achieved or exceeded they have been given a score of 1. The sum of the two scores (+1) groups the schools. 1 is where the school is classed as not having achieved either attainment measure, 2 is where the school has achieved one, 3 is where the school has achieved both. To aide comparability to Ofsted grades were then inverted so that a performance grade of 3 was converted to a 1 and vice versa.

Primary Attainment band: The measures for percentage of pupils attaining L4+ in English and Maths at KS2 have been compared to the national average. For each school, where the national average has been achieved or exceeded they have been given a score of 1. The sum of the two scores (+1) groups the schools. 1 is where the school is classed as not having achieved either attainment measure, 2 is where the school has achieved one, 3 is where the school has achieved both. As the national average data is not available for 2010 (due to SATs boycotting) 2009 data has been used for this measure.

Primary Progress band: The measures for percentage of pupils making expected progress in English and Maths have been compared to the national average. For each school, where the national average has been achieved or exceeded they have been given a score of 1. The sum of the two scores (+1) groups the schools. 1 is where the school is classed as not having achieved either measure, 2 is where the school has achieved one, 3 is where the school has achieved both. As the national average data is not available for 2010 (due to SATs boycotting) 2009 data has been used for this measure.

Data used:

| Secondary | Size | SEN (SA,SA+,st) |
|-----------|------|-----------------|
| 0th | 38 | 0 |
| 20th | 655 | 13.7 |
| 40th | 864 | 18.5 |
| 60th | 1054 | 23.6 |
| 80th | 1304 | 30.7 |
| 100th | 2620 | 76.6 |

| Primary | Size | SEN (SA,SA+,st) |
|---------|------|-----------------|
| 0th | 7 | 0 |
| 20th | 121 | 12.1 |
| 40th | 199 | 16.4 |
| 60th | 243 | 20.9 |
| 80th | 353 | 26.9 |
| 100th | 984 | 83.8 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| Nat average 2010 5A*-c incl. EnMA | 54 |
| Nat average 2010 5A*-c | 75 |
| Progress En | 70 |
| Progress Ma | 63 |
| L4+ En 09 | 80 |
| L4+ Ma 09 | 79 |
| KS2 Expected Progress 09 En | 82 |
| KS2 Expected Progress 09 Ma | 81 |

Notes:

- Where a school had a 6th form, figures for pupil numbers and Ofsted grades exclude the 6th form.
- Some schools are new start schools and therefore do not have complete performance data. Pupil numbers are the last reported rather than when full.
- One school has both Primary and Secondary Provision but the respondent was the Head of Secondary and his Clerk. Data therefore refers to Secondary provision.
- One school includes a boys and girls school in federation but the Head interviewed was Head of one part. The Ofsted refers to the two together and DfE performance data to the two separately.
- One school had not yet had a full inspection. The overall judgement from a monitoring visit is used here
- Most Ofsted inspections took place in 2009, 2010 and 2011. One was in 2008 and two were in 2007 but monitoring visits for these two took place in 2010 and the judgements upheld.

Appendix 3

Governor qualities categorisation

The following categorisation is based on the particular content and context of interviewees comments.

| BEHAVIOUR AND APPROACH |
|----------------------------------|
| Engaging and participating |
| Challenge |
| Critical friend |
| Pupil focused |
| Supportive |
| Overall school not particularism |

| COMPETENCIES AND DISPOSITIONS |
|--|
| Data |
| Analytical |
| Building positive trusting relationships |
| Communication |
| Diplomatic |
| Inquisitive |
| Impatient, Driven, sense of urgency |
| Strategic |
| Leadership |
| Questioning skill |
| Confidence |
| Decisive |
| Common sense |
| Seeing different perspectives |
| Collaborative |

| EXPERIENCE AND EXPERTISE |
|-------------------------------------|
| Educational background or knowledge |
| Finance |
| Business |
| HR |
| Legal |
| Marketing |
| Networks |
| Buildings and premises |
| Project Management |
| Leadership and Management |
| IT |
| Health and Safety |

| VARIETY AND REPRESENTATION |
|-----------------------------------|
| Representative |
| ...of community |
| ...of parents |
| ...of staff |
| Variety |

| UNDERSTANDING OF CONTEXT |
|---|
| ... of the social context and community |
| ...of the school |
| ...from the inside |

| TIME AND ATTENDANCE |
|----------------------------|
| |

| MOTIVATIONS AND ALLIGNMENT |
|-----------------------------------|
| Alignment |

| TRAINING AND PRACTICE AS A GOVERNOR |
|--|
| |

Appendix 4

Key characteristics of effective governing bodies - Ofsted 2011 (pp.5)

- 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 head teacher 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 head teacher, 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.
- 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.

achieve ambassador areas attainment aware background blank board bring call

challenging change circumstances comfortable committee companies confidence

confronted context course cultural curriculum data dealing decision develops different discussion

education effect energy engaging environment experiences explain face fact failed

focus goal governors great head help idea important improve information initiatives

inject instance interpret itself kind know knowledge learning level management meeting

opportunity organisation paper past performance perspective point progress provide pupil read recover

relative research rules same school share situation skill source staff standards

students successes suggesting table talking targets teach teacher understand

useful valuable value view vision whereas wrong achieve ambassador areas attainment aware

background blank board bring call challenging change circumstances comfortable committee companies confidence confronted context course cultural curriculum data dealing decision

develops different discussion education effect energy engaging environment

experiences explain face fact failed focus goal governors great head help idea

important improve information initiatives inject instance interpret itself kind know

knowledge learning level management meeting opportunity organisation paper past performance perspective point progress provide pupil read recover relative research rules same

school share situation skill source staff standards students successes suggesting

table talking

It's not just who you are... it's what you do and how: How can Teach First ambassador governors best address educational disadvantage? A report by LKMco for Teach First by Loic Menzies, John Roberts & Garth Stahl // 2012