

Improving governance



A training resource for schools

April 2013

What is our track record?



Senior leaders	Governing body
Longer term:	Longer term:
Short term:	Short term:

Consider the impact that the senior professional leadership of the school have had, and also the governing body. Working as small groups, identify significant improvements that they have led, managed or inspired. By 'short term' we mean within the last six months, by 'long term' we mean within the last two or three years.

Now, list at least four things you think the school perhaps ought to have done, but hasn't yet completed (or even started):

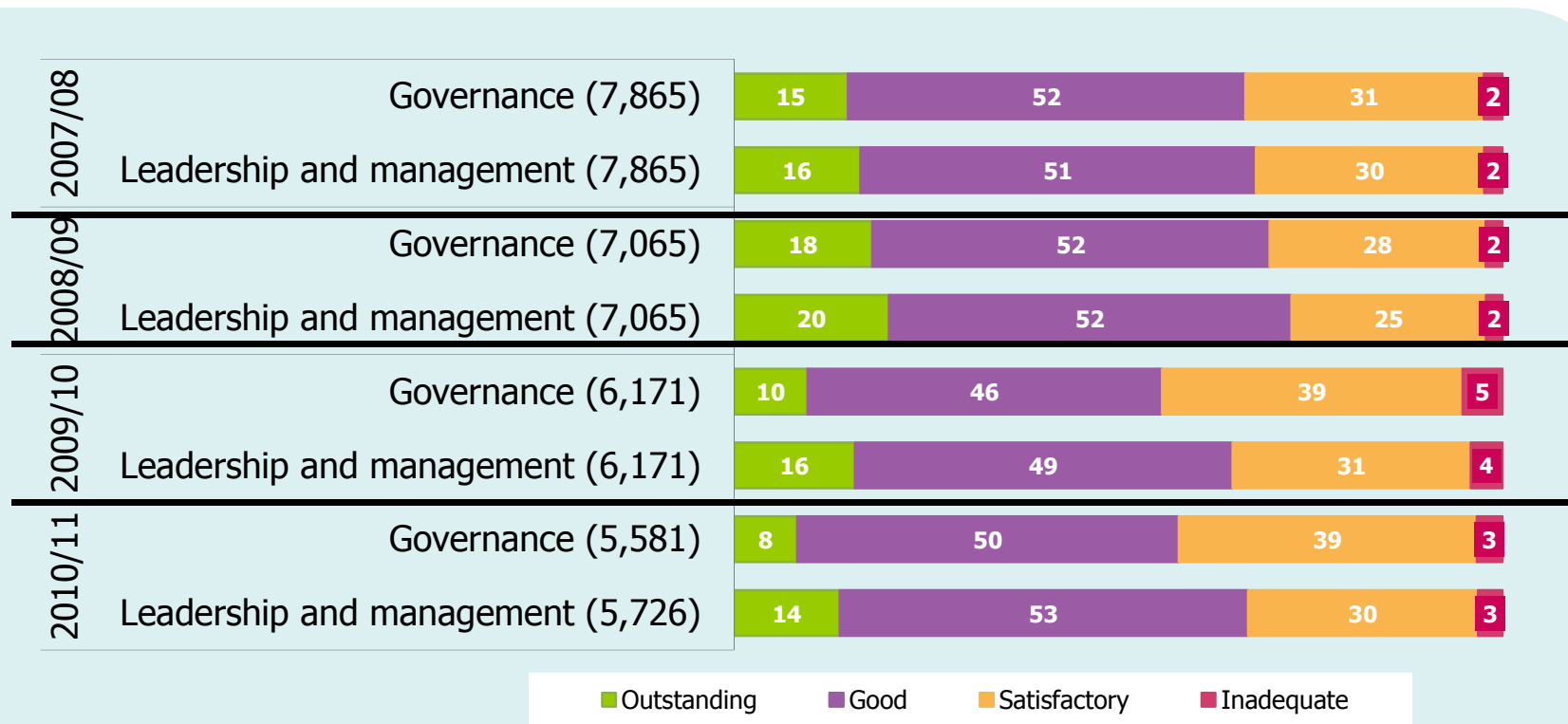


What **should** we have done?

Why haven't we done it?

Now think about the barriers. Why haven't you done the things that you now think you should have?

When Ofsted judged them separately, 'Leadership and management' was consistently judged more favourably than governance

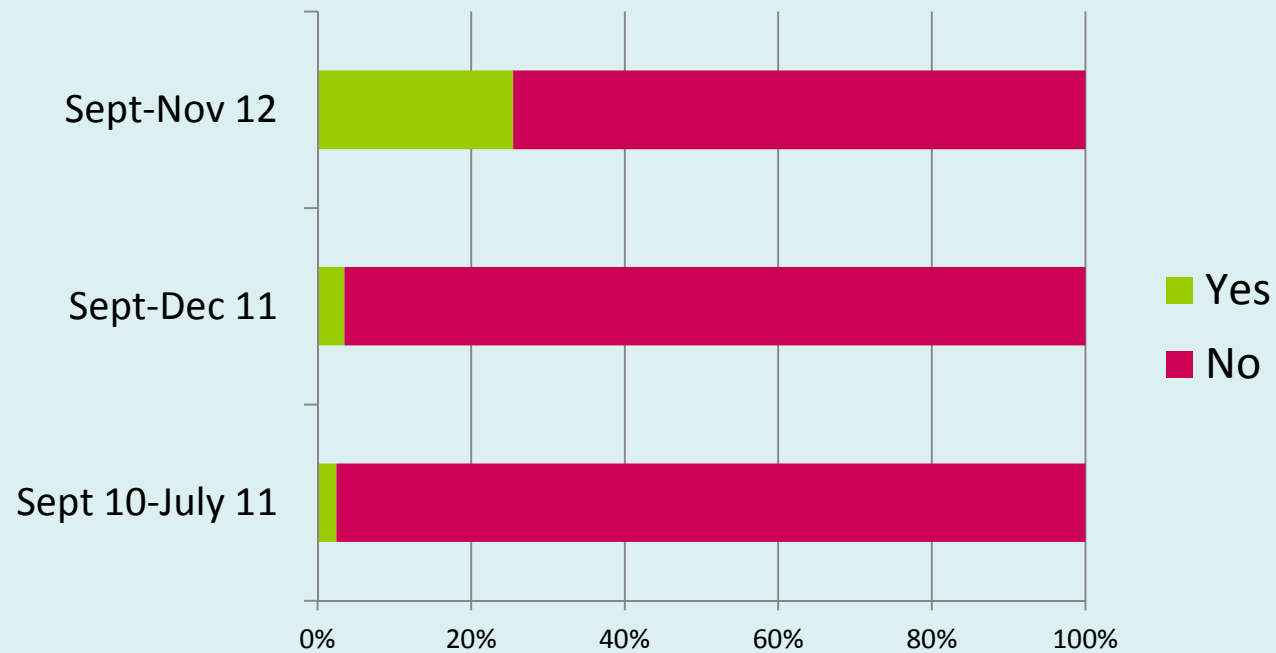


What stops governors from playing the leading role in the school?
 What should their role be?

Since September 2012, Ofsted has significantly increased the focus on school governance



Proportion of all inspected schools receiving recommendations regarding governance



Since September 2012, Ofsted has significantly increased the focus on school governance



- What did Ofsted say about our school governing body?

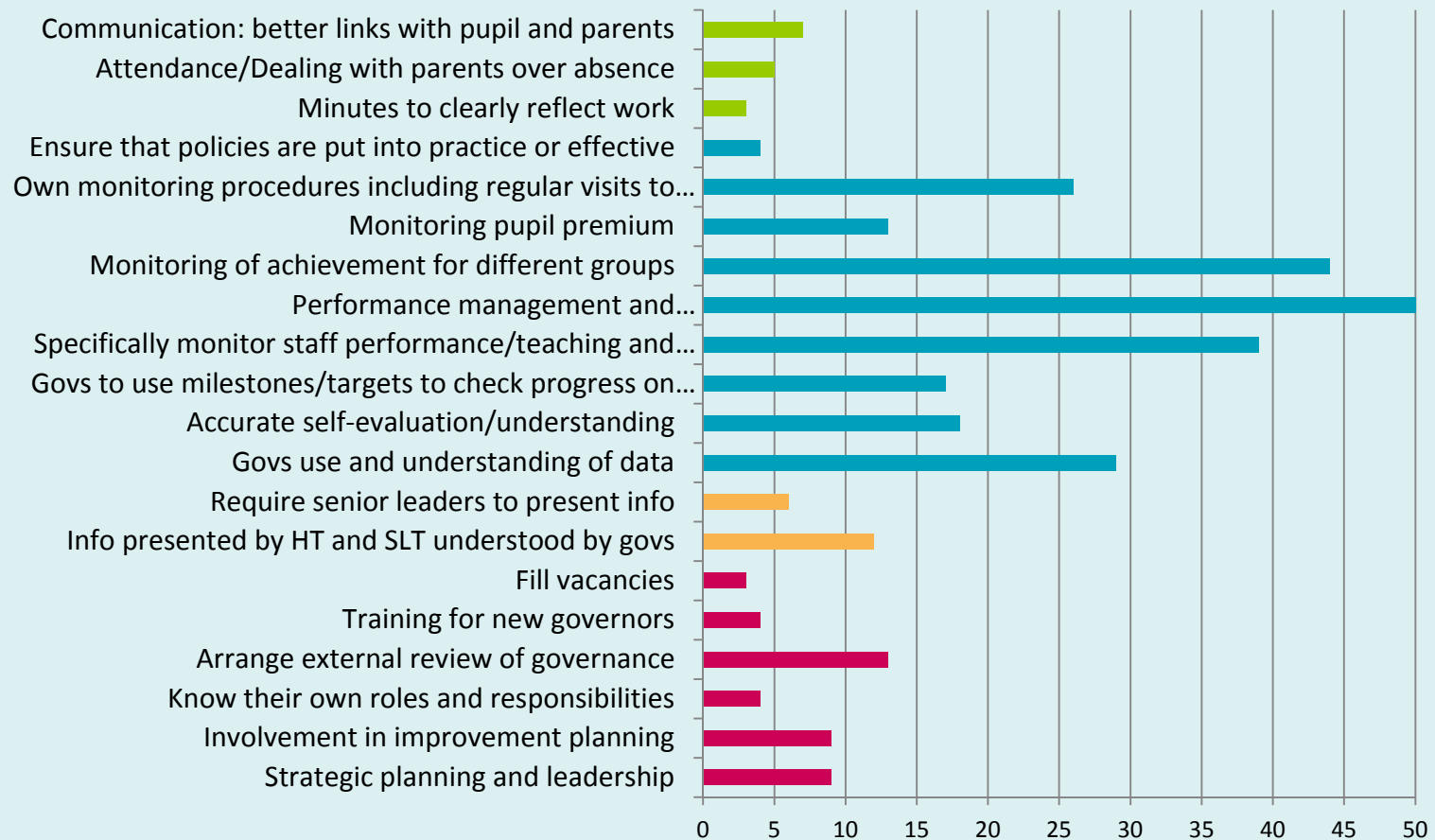
In your groups, make a list of the key points

- On the next slide, we will see what points Ofsted raised about governing bodies from a sample of its reports.

Inspection is providing significant challenge to governing bodies about monitoring and performance management



Main recommendations for governors September to November 2012



More detailed report recommendations provide an agenda for improving a governing body:



The analysis of recommendations suggest that national priorities for improving governance should focus on:

- techniques for governors to use in knowing their school independently of the headteacher, for example, when visiting aspects of the school's work
- how to use data to get to their own independent view of achievement, including of specific groups
- how to work with the headteacher on the performance management of staff and teaching in particular
- how to plan and deliver performance management of the headteacher including setting targets
- helping governors to work with their headteachers to promote mutual accountability.

These are the short term issues: later we will come back to the question of the longer term, strategic questions. For now, judge yourself as **strong/solid/weak** on each of the five areas. Now compare with others.

A model of what goes wrong in declining schools: problems start when processes to ensure accountability or drive change start to falter



Factors influencing accountability:

- lack data skills and training
- excessive trust or too friendly
- lack of external evidence, eg SIP
- headteacher provides unbalanced information
- lack of own monitoring and information
- misplaced loyalty

Factors restricting capacity, eg:

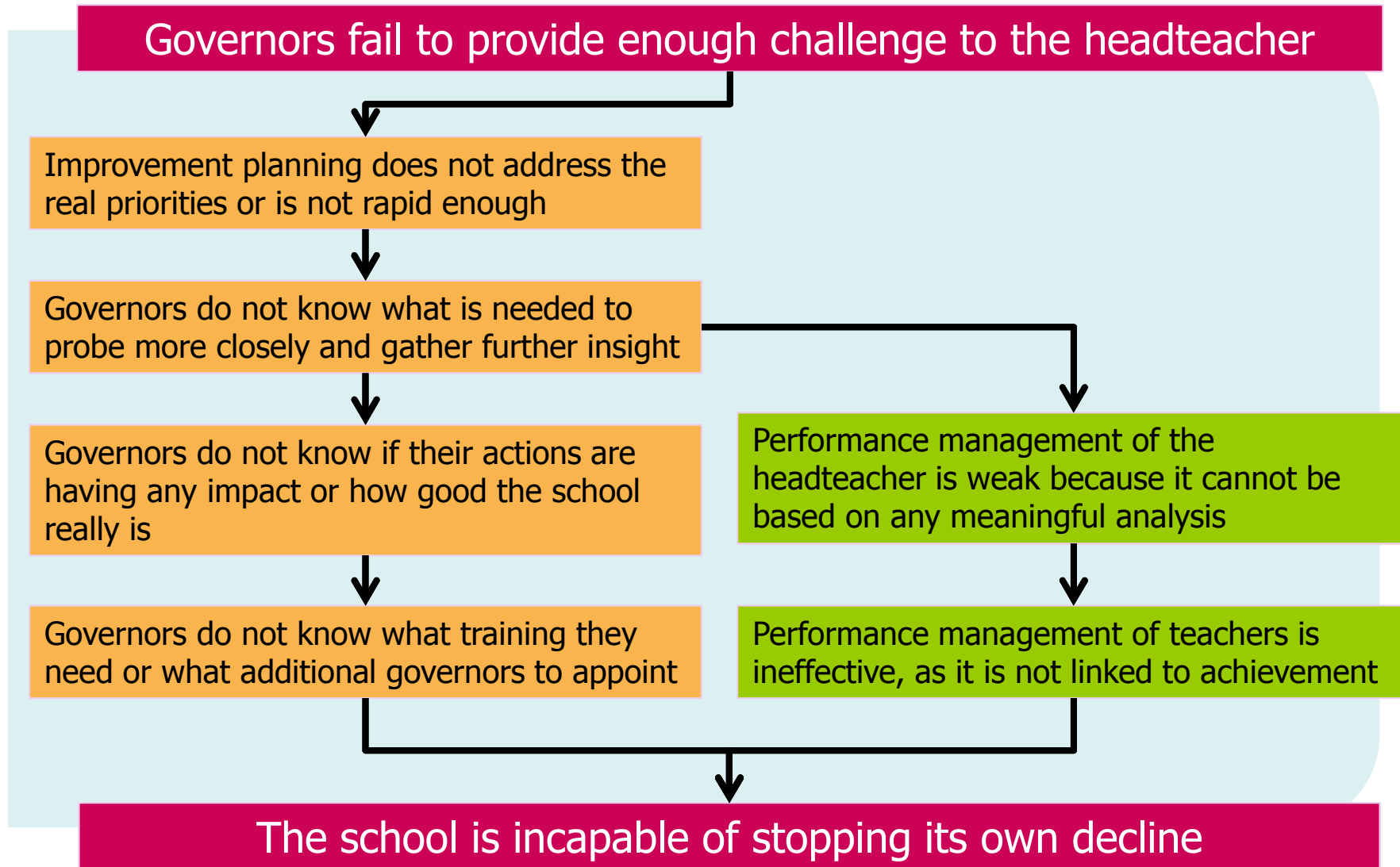
- Chair of Governors in post a long time and 'world has moved on'
- governors not strategic or evaluative in thinking
- diverted by building plans, falling rolls, academisation, etc.
- internal 'turbulence'.

Over-reliant on headteacher for knowledge of the school

Lack of urgency due to complacency or distractions

Governors fail to provide enough challenge to headteacher

The consequences of a failure to challenge undermine the running of the school



Governors fail to engage in effective activities



This HMI comment illustrates some 'classic' problems with governors:

'The governors were too reliant on the SIP reports and those from the headteacher about better outcomes in KS2 and were unable to challenge the school sufficiently about the lack of improvement over a number of years at Key Stage 1 as they were not aware of the situation.'

What are the problems here? Can you identify four?

- Governors relied on the headteacher for selecting the information they should see and were too accepting of what they were told.
- The SIP was unable to provide genuine challenge.
- Governors lacked the skills to know what to ask for.
- Governors had no means of identifying problems.
- Problems were not discussed for years.

Governors fail to engage in effective activities



This HMI comment illustrates some 'classic' problems with governors:

'The governing body was too trusting. They accepted what the headteacher told them without questioning it. So, when the headteacher told them that results were good, they simply accepted this, when in fact they were very low. Performance management of the headteacher by the governing body was also very poor, with targets such as "appoint a SENCO" rather than related to the school's performance. They accepted excuses, such as high mobility (it wasn't high) without question.'

Identify the three main weaknesses of the governing body.

These governors were unable to provide effective challenge because:

- they had a poor grasp of target setting and performance management
- they did not see challenging the headteacher as a key part of their role
- they had no independent understanding of data.

A correctly balanced relationship between the governing body and the headteacher is crucial, however good a school is, and vital to maintain excellence



Excessive trust, often based on years of working together:

'Too accepting of the headteacher's reports and judgements about teaching.'

'Under the first headteacher, the governing body thought all was well at the school and students were achieving as well as they could.'

Friends rather than business partners:

'Some governors made an effort but the longstanding chair was a great friend of the headteacher.'

Too subservient: 'They did as they were told.'

Having appointed the headteacher, reluctant to accept that 'we made a mistake.'

'Very supportive of the head, who they appointed.'

A correctly balanced relationship between the governing body and the headteacher is crucial, however good a school is, and vital to maintain excellence



Do you think the governing body has played a significant role in school improvement?

'The governing body are very supportive. I wouldn't change them but not sure that they are instrumental in raising standards – that is my job and the job of my staff. Governors help with setting vision and ethos; clerk is excellent. They have been very helpful in getting out 'all the dreaded policies.'

This headteacher had overseen the improvement of her school to be outstanding – but are there any warning signs in this relationship?

- HT denies governors have a role in raising standards
- Sees governors as about setting vision and managing policies, not education
- There is a risk governors will not be able to provide sufficient challenge in future

1. Identify the good practice here
2. Is that sort of practice happening at your school?



Do you think the governing body has played a significant role in the improvement?

'Yes. I have empowered the governing body to be proactive and challenging to me as a leader. We have used Governor strengths analysis to ensure they sit on the right committees to utilise their expertise.'

If so, how have effective governors been recruited?

'Governors are recruited because the school promotes the importance of a strong governing body and the positive impact it has on children's learning. All governors recruited are made aware of the importance of training to make them effective in this role.'

All governors are assigned a governor buddy.'

Reflection

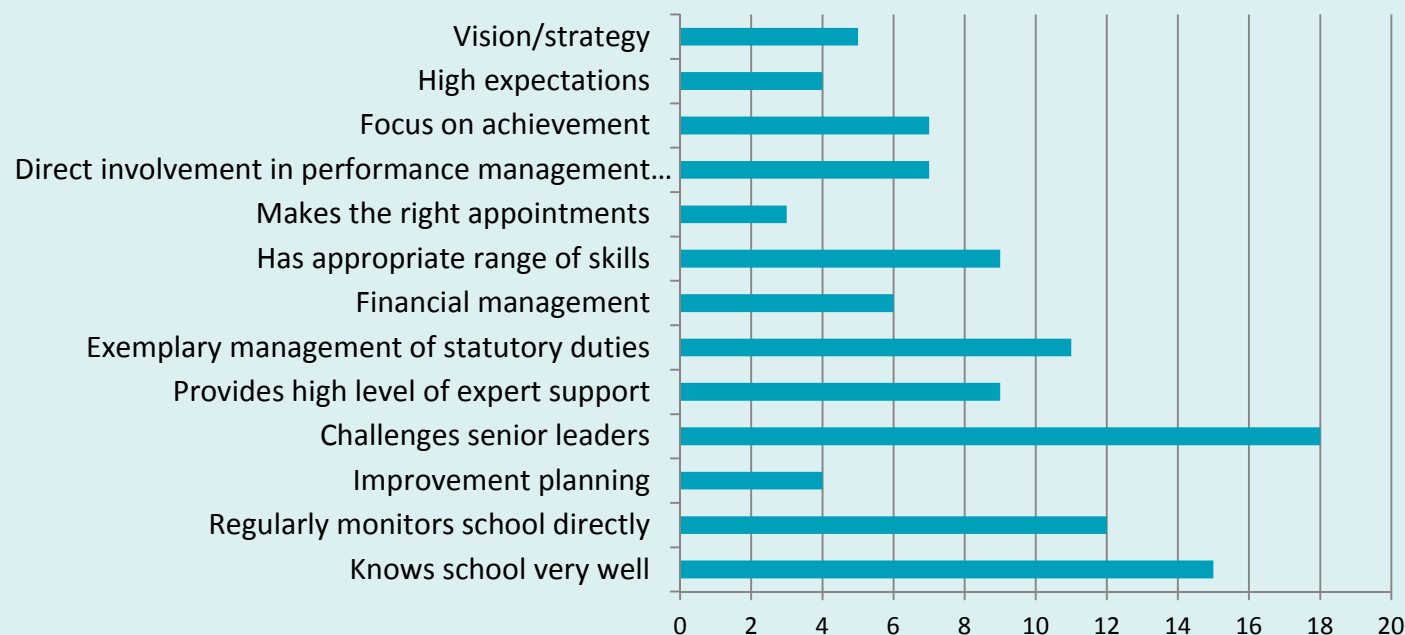
Now think back to the first discussion you had.

In small groups, discuss what you now think are the **strengths** of the current governing body?

Analysis of the most effective schools shows there is robust challenge to senior leaders by governors who know the school well, but who also have a secure grasp of their basic duties



Main governance strengths identified from an analysis of reports on outstanding schools, Sept-Nov 2012



This analysis is based on what inspectors **chose** to comment on as particular strengths.

In the best schools inspectors found governors were very well informed



'Regular meetings with the headteacher and presentations from staff inform governors' **understanding** of the school and its work.'

'The governing body **seeks the views** of parents, carers and pupils and **uses the information** obtained to inform the school's self-evaluation and the school development plan.'

'Governors have a **good awareness** of the school and a clear view of the **strategic direction** of the school through **regular visits**, including to lessons and focus groups.'

'Governors **carry out their own monitoring of the school's plans** and use this to evaluate how well all aspects are doing. They clearly **understand how well pupils are progressing**, making it their business to **probe the school** about any concerns, should they arise.'

'Outstanding quality of work undertaken by the governing body could clearly be seen in an **audit of the impact** on pupils' learning of recent disruptions caused by inclement weather. As a result of the audit, staff have now agreed a plan to make up any future lost learning time.'

'Governors are closely involved in **self-evaluation** procedures, ask penetrating questions and expect and **receive regular reports** and presentations from staff to inform their strategic decision making.'

Governors in these schools know how to challenge and have the right skills



'The governors receive regular and comprehensive reports from the head teacher and have also requested that heads of subject areas attend meetings of the governing body where they are challenged to explain any remaining gaps in attainment for different groups of students.'

'The members of the governing body are extremely well informed and possess a range of skills and expertise to challenge leaders and managers about the performance of the school - there are many established members who are critical friends of the school's leaders and have effectively challenged many aspects of the school's performance including the new curriculum developments.'

'The governing body has the knowledge and skills to ask the necessary questions, so that governors can effectively hold the school to account.'

'The Chair of the Governing body is capable and astute. He has used his wealth of business experience to support the school in challenging underperformance.'

'Governors have an excellent understanding of the link between performance management and the salary structure.'

The characteristics of strong governing bodies demonstrated in recent reports



- They understand their role and how it complements that of the headteacher.
- They have a range of skills that brings something extra to the school and to develop a strategic vision.
- Technical knowledge – of education, data, statutory responsibilities and performance management in particular.
- They want to see and hear from middle and senior leaders about their work - and challenge them on it.
- They have the skills and time to be a visible presence in the school.
- They set challenging targets for performance at all levels, including in achievement, teaching and senior management work.
- They can form their own analysis of the school's performance without relying on the headteacher.

Task: identify one priority from this list and draw up a plan as to how you will achieve it within six months.

Approaches to performance management of staff:



The National Governors' Association says:

Governing bodies, with their over-arching responsibility for performance management, should ensure that they not only receive reports about whether performance management has been carried out, but also an assessment of the impact it has made and the correlation between the performance management statements and pay.

Task:

- a) Consider whether your governing body does all the activities indicated here
- b) Which of the following groups do you make such checks with? Headteacher; senior managers'; middle managers; teachers; classroom support assistants; non-teaching staff.....
- c) Do you know of staff are supported and challenged to improve?
- d) Is good performance rewarded and under-performance tackled?

Effective governance is a vital component in maintaining excellence



One headteacher whose school improved to outstanding started by working with another school on restructuring the governing body. Governors were permitted to attend **any** meetings, but there were also raised expectations of governor accountability and competence.

Do you think the governing body has played a significant role in the improvement?

'Yes, their focus on monitoring, asking "critical friend" questions and support for us all has made them a visible and effective part of the team.'

If so, how have effective governors been recruited?

'Through governor competency procedures, annual governor questionnaires about their role and then deciding on the weakest links within the governing body and finding articulate people who would fulfil the roles.'

Very few school governing bodies use their websites to engage with stakeholders such as parents about what they are doing



Governors' visits to the school are described in posts on the school website.

Is this a good way of engaging with your stakeholders?

On **Wednesday 21 November** I was in school twice. Firstly to see my mentee for half an hour. This always proves to be very worthwhile and I thoroughly enjoy the time spent with her.

The afternoon saw me back in school for the Performance and Standards meeting. I was delighted to be asked to Chair this panel again. Two hours were very well spent ensuring students' progress is well monitored. The attendance, punctuality and exclusion figures scrutinised by Governors were all showing very positive trends.

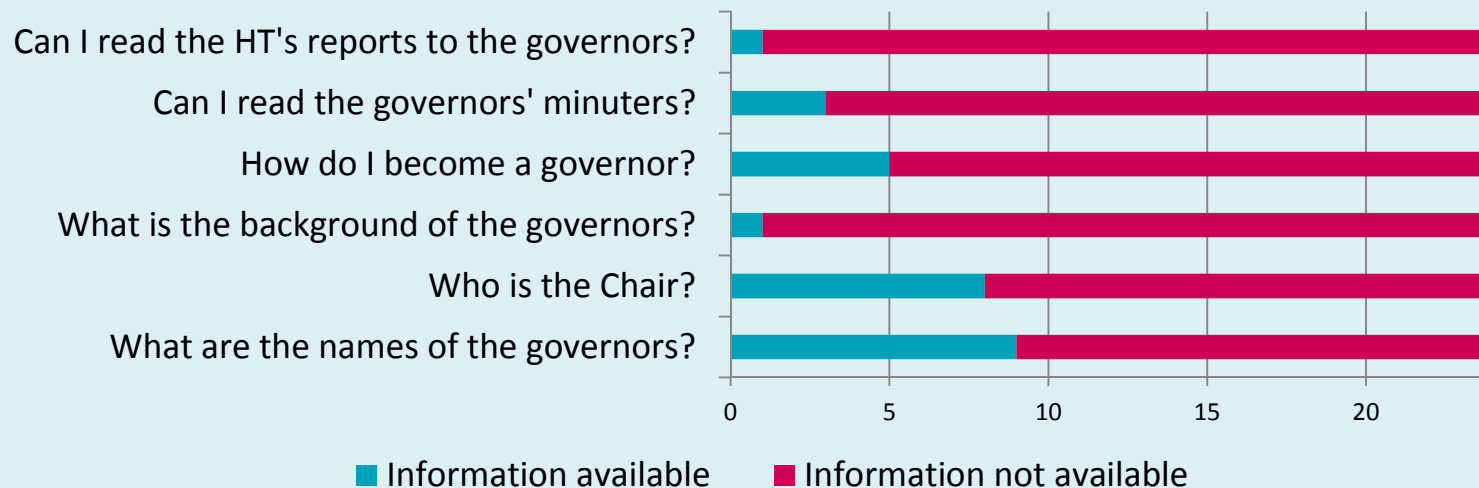
Friday 30 November was spent meeting all the Senior Leadership Group with a small group of governors reviewing their performance and remuneration. We also were given a very good lunch!

15 October 2012: I attended two 'learning walks' with Ann Rickard and two visitors from a School in Birmingham on Monday. I was particularly impressed with the assessment and marking standards as evidenced in the randomly selected exercise books seen by me. The teacher's comments were constructive and pointed the student towards achievable targets; in all instances the students had responded with the additional information required.

Even outstanding schools do not openly provide information about their governors and what they do in the school



Sample of outstanding schools' websites governor information



A very small number of schools provide detailed information about the governors, including biographies; the headteacher's termly reports to them; and lists of which faculties each is attached to. Governor biographies are more common for independent schools.

Governors have a key role in 'engaging with stakeholders':



WHO are your stakeholders?

- Agree four groups who you see as key stakeholders in your school
- Consider whether you think you engage with these groups
 - Very well
 - Quite well
 - Not well
- If you said 'Not well' to any of them – what actions will you take to improve the situation?

Governors have a key role in 'engaging with stakeholders':



The headteacher has proposed to your governing body that there should be a new approach to setting homework. Rather than being set on a daily or weekly basis by subject, there would be a plan of longer 'learning projects' for pupils to work on over the term.

What stakeholder engagement issues does this proposal pose?

Two letters in your local paper appear to criticise your school – one from a shopkeeper complaining about children smoking in town 'in school uniform' and another from an employer, complaining about standards of numeracy.

Does this have anything to do with governors?

Governors tend to underplay their long-term, strategic role:



This is an extract from the 2012 report on a school judged to be inadequate, and to have serious weaknesses. The inspection commented on the strengths of the governors:

The governance of the school:

- ensures that safeguarding and child protection procedures are fully in place
- supports vulnerable students by helping parents to support their children
- monitors the performance of all staff, including the headteacher, before they agree increases in pay
- has carried out routine monitoring of teaching in order to understand how well pupils are doing. This is so they can support the school as well as hold school leaders to account for the progress made by students.

Previous inspection results: 2003 – satisfactory; 2007 – Notice to improve/inadequate; 2008 – satisfactory; 2010 – satisfactory; 2012 – Serious weaknesses/inadequate.

What do you think the governors SHOULD have done in this situation?

Governors have a strategic role to plan the future, but they must also monitor the present:



What should the governing body be doing about **pupil premium**? Identify which of the following you **SHOULD** be doing:

Ensuring that all eligible pupils are supported with teaching assistants

Monitoring the progress of children who have English as an additional language

Publish on the school website a report on their spending of pupil premium funding

Monitor the progress of children who are from Service families

Hold the headteacher to account for whether spending is overcoming barriers to learning for the eligible pupils

Monitoring the progress of children eligible for free school meals and who are looked after

Providing out of school classes to all FSM pupils

Being strategic does not mean you lose the focus on day to day responsibilities:



Which of these do governors have a responsibility for?

Agreeing the policy for sex education

Ensuring equal opportunities for pupils

Ensuring there is no discrimination in the appointment or treatment of staff

Checking the performance of pupils with special educational needs

Promoting community cohesion

Monitoring the extent of bullying, including homophobic bullying

Ensuring school transport is safe for the pupils

Making health and safety checks

Promoting high standards

All of the governing body's work should be informed by the principles of 'Best Value':



There are FOUR Best Value principles, all beginning with 'C':

Do you know what they are?

The 'Best Value' name often makes people think it is just about finance, but it is really about creating a culture of continuous improvement including high standards – the best value from everything.

All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership



We have simplified the twenty 'self-evaluation' questions from the Parliamentary group:

1. Have we completed a skills audit?	2. Do we find and appoint people on the basis of their skills?
3. Do we understand roles and responsibilities?	4. Do we have professional clerking?
5. Is their budgeted training for governor needs?	6. Do we know national concepts of good practice?
7. Is our committee structure effective?	8. Does everyone contribute and do we review effectiveness?
9. Do we have clear planning with monitoring?	10. Does strategic planning drive our activities?
11. Do we understand performance data?	12. How effectively do we performance manage the headteacher?
13. Do we ensure value for money?	14. Do we listen to pupils, parents and staff?
15. Do we report to parents and community?	16. Do we gain from collaborations?
17. Do we review the chair's performance?	18. Do we plan for succession?
19. Are chairs re-elected annually?	20. How much have we contributed to school improvement in last three years?

All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership



Ofsted's report on *Getting to Good* includes a section on governance, explaining what improvements schools who improved to 'good' made in their governance. There are four actions spelt out in the report:

- Headteachers, supported by local authorities ensured that all governors were fully committed to the role. In some cases this led to individual governors deciding to resign.
- Governors embarked on structured training programmes, often provided by the local authority, to strengthen their role.
- Partnerships between governing bodies from different schools were established to share good practice.
- Governing bodies worked alongside headteachers on school improvement. Usually they were allocated specific aspects of school improvement to check and report on.

Consider how far your governing body is ready to become leaders of a good school by comparing yourselves with the actions of these schools.

Speech by HMCI, 2012;

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/strong-governance-learning-best-hmci-speech.

Good practice survey, 2011;

www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/100238.

Role of the governing body:

www.education.gov.uk/a0056549/roles-of-governing-bodies-and-headteachers.

School Data Dashboard:

<http://dashboard.ofsted.gov.uk>.

