How to respond to Ofsted inspectors’ questions

The following guidance relates to the previous Ofsted framework (ie 2009 schedule) but might be of use to any governors considering how they would respond to questions from an Ofsted inspector.

What will Ofsted ask governors and what answers will they expect?

An education expert, Ken Bush, explains the type of responses that are expected. He also offers general guidance on what Ofsted inspectors are looking for.

Ofsted publishes a briefing document for inspectors, which includes a list of sample questions that inspectors can ask to help them evaluate the effectiveness of governance.

Strengths and weaknesses of the school

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the school and how do governors know?

The key focus of this answer is likely to be on outcomes for pupils. The most important (in inspection terms) are achievement, behaviour and attendance.

Governors would be expected to have a fair working knowledge of the school’s progress in these areas, based on rigorous monitoring and evaluation. This should take place during governors’ meetings.

Strengths and weaknesses of the governing body

What are the strengths and areas for development for the governing body?

Can governors give examples of how they have supported and challenged the school?

How are the training needs of governors identified and addressed?

What training have governors undertaken recently and what has been the impact of this training?

These questions are testing the extent to which governors have reflected on their own effectiveness. Governors may comment on how they support the school, act as critical friends, hold the school to account, and are involved in strategic planning.

In an ideal world, governors’ training needs would be identified in a similar way as for staff. While this is not always possible, some form of auditing should take place, using tools such as Governor Mark.
Self-evaluation and school improvement

What are the main barriers to learning and what action has been taken to overcome them?

How successful have the actions been?

The main barriers to learning might include:

- Lack of specialist staffing
- Inadequate accommodation
- Tight budgets
- Challenging pupil intake
- Limited parental aspirations

However, the main thrust of the question is to see if governors are focused on problems or solutions. Knowledge of ‘how successful the actions have been’ links to the effectiveness of monitoring and evaluation.

What contribution does the governing body think it has made to improving provision, especially teaching, and outcomes for pupils?

Governors should be aware that, in inspection terms, provision includes: teaching, the curriculum, care, guidance and support.

Governors should have had some involvement in the recruitment of staff. They should be aware of how continuing professional development (CPD) resources have been used. They should also have been consulted on major curriculum changes, e.g. literacy and numeracy provision.

Governors may also have had some direct input into behaviour plans for individual pupils.

To what extent is the governing body involved in the school’s processes for self-evaluation and improvement planning?

How do governors monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the school improvement plan?

Governors should explain:

- How they are involved in identifying priorities
- Whether specific individuals monitor parts of the plan to give a ‘hands on’ dimension
- How frequently the plan is subject to scrutiny
Safeguarding

What are the procedures for safeguarding pupils and how have training needs been met?
The governing body is not responsible for the day-to-day operation of safeguarding procedures, but must have a close involvement in the formulation of the child protection policy and monitor and evaluate its impact annually.
The key question governors must ask themselves is: does the policy work and what information will be needed to make that judgement?
The governor and the senior member of staff that have responsibility for safeguarding may hold regular meetings. The governing body may also ‘spot check’ the single central record. Governors must also stay up to date with training guidance and minimum training standards, including refresher training.

Consultation with parents and the community

Governor drop-in sessions can be an effective way of maintaining awareness of parental concerns

How do governors consult parents/the local community?
Can governors give examples of when parental/community views have been sought and acted upon?

In order to be judged as at least ‘Good’ for governance, governors need to be able to demonstrate that they have systems in place to seek parental views and, if required, act on them. Increasingly, inspectors are asking for specific examples.
Governor drop-in sessions can be an effective way of maintaining awareness of parental concerns.
Other possible questions to governors

In addition to the questions from Ofsted’s document, Ken Bush suggested three others:

*How effectively do governors fulfill the full range of statutory duties?*

Governors should be writing *(C2G note: Really?)* and reviewing policies. They should ensure that they have the necessary information, which might include:

- Achievement, attendance and exclusion data organised by pupil groups (e.g. free school meals, ethnicity)
- Racial incident and bullying logs

Other areas which are likely to come up during inspection are:

- The governing body’s responsibility to tackle discrimination and promote community cohesion
- Equality of opportunity

*What is the governing body’s view of the quality of leadership in the school?*

Governors should show an understanding of what effective school leadership is. This might include:

- Improving the outcomes for pupils
- Building capacity for improvement via CPD
- Delegating leadership duties to staff
- Developing a positive ethos

In larger schools, an awareness of the relevant strengths and weaknesses of middle leadership might also be expected.

*How effectively does the governing body ensure that its skills and expertise are utilised?*

The chair of governors is responsible for making the best use of individuals within the governing body. Inspectors will look for examples showing that governors’ talents and skills have been identified and utilised.
What are inspectors looking for from the governing body?

Ken Bush says that a general set of expectations might include:

- Clear knowledge and understanding of the extent of their duties, particularly those which are statutory
- Awareness of the main issues that the school is facing and how well school leaders are going about the task of improvement
- Evidence of involvement in school life
- Evidence of the impact of governors’ actions and interventions
- Awareness of the views and concerns of pupils, parents and the wider community; and where appropriate, evidence of responsiveness to the issues raised
- A view of what constitutes community cohesion and an evaluation of what has been achieved to date

Who should represent the governing body?

Before an inspection, the headteacher and chair of governors should take a strategic approach to deciding which particular governors should represent the governing body and why.