EXTERNAL REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

High quality school or academy governance is a priority for all educational establishments and trusts. It ensures that the provision that is offered is in line with all statutory systems and meets all compliance requirements. Failing to do this can risk schools, academies and trusts not meeting their legal duties and expectations.

Highly effective governance also ensures that operational leaders and what educational establishments and trusts deliver is of the best quality so that the needs of all pupils and other stakeholders are met. The quality of governance is also of great importance in terms of meeting what is required during external inspection and in relation to meeting legal requirements in relation to finances and value for money.

As well as ensuring that the children in the care of schools and academies get the best education possible to meet their needs, it is also crucial that all children are safe and happy in school. To that end it is of paramount importance that all safeguarding, and child protection systems are properly in place and adhered to. It is for those with responsibility for governance to ensure that all these systems are in place and operating with a high degree of effectiveness.

A full external review of governance will check and confirm that all the necessary and statutory elements of governance are in place for any school, academy, or trust. It will also highlight areas of strength and weakness within governance systems and protocols and suggest where improvements can or need to be made to meet the highest standards.

The Process

Our review team will take on the role of ‘critical friend’ and advisor, highlighting both areas of strength around governance, but also identifying what can be improved.

For a full external review of governance, the team will, depending on the size of a trust (number of schools) or the size of an individual school, spend one or more days with you and then provide a summary report of their findings, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement as well as recommendations for further improvement. Ahead of the review the review team will need access to your governance documentation, governance IT systems (where used) and will also review the trust/schools’ websites. During the time with the trust/school, the reviewer(s) will develop an understanding of the trust and its school(s), refer to/review specific documentation, and interview a range of key stakeholders so that a full view of governance can be captured. Using all the evidence gathered either directly or from documentation the final report and recommendations will be constructed.

Six months after the full review, a follow-up call will enable the review team to reflect on progress made with the recommendations that were made as the final part of the original report.

**What is involved in an external review of governance?**

As set out by the Department for Education, an external review of governance (ERG) examines the effectiveness of a governance board based on the 6 features of effective governance, which are set out in the DfE’s Governance Handbook. These are:

* strategic leadership
* accountability
* people
* structures
* compliance
* evaluation

As explained the ERG is conducted by an experienced governance expert(s) who is external to, and independent of, the board and the executive leaders.

The review will examine the governance structure, operations, and performance across the board, working closely with the board, executive leaders, and the governance professional (previously referred to as ‘clerks’), to improve the board’s performance. Governance operations could include a range of contributors, including the governance professional or equivalent, the school business manager, legal and HR support and others.

A review should:

* consider the process and impact of decision making
* consider the impact of the governance support provided to the board
* test compliance with mandatory requirements

Ultimately a review should enable the board to provide reassurance to stakeholders and others that it takes its responsibilities seriously and is endeavouring to carry them out effectively. In academy trusts, proving this assurance to members is essential for the members to carry out their role. A review provides a board with:

* an independent, objective view of its strengths and areas for improvement
* clear recommendations for future improvement
* an opportunity for the board to review the strategic direction of the organisation and to evaluate the effectiveness of its processes and systems

Flexibility

The scope of the review must fit in with the Department for Education’s basic framework as set out in the Governance Handbook, but also needs to be bespoke to the context and needs of the trust/school(s). So, the specific details of the review need to be agreed in advance and will consider the trust/school size, number of days allocated etc.

We are happy to discuss any particular requirements, concerns or focus the school has and tailor the review as required. This scope outlines the detail of a full external review of governance, which requires four days of work. However, Juniper also offers shorter reviews, focusing on the most essential aspects of governance, or reviews that cover areas/themes agreed and confirmed with the client.

Before the Review

Prior to the review we will discuss with the trust/school any particular focus that may be required and confirm that all the arrangements are in place including times for any interviews with staff. This will be included in a bespoke scoping document, which will then be followed up with a detailed programme and schedule for the visit of the reviewer(s) to the trust/school.

We will ask you to send to your reviewer(s), all appropriate and requested documentation and paperwork at least 2 weeks in advance. On the review day, if there are any additional items that need to be seen, then the reviewer(s) will request these in advance so that they may be available for viewing on the day.

On the Day of The Review Visit

We will aim to be at the school at about 9:30am and will leave before the end of school unless otherwise agreed. However, precise timings around this will be agreed and confirmed in advance.

We will ask you to:

* Provide us with a base for us to work from, this will need to be suitable for any interviews we undertake as well as for document scrutiny.
* Provide tea/coffee/lunch facilities.
* Provide parking spaces as required.
* Identify a key contact who can provide any further documents etc which are needed and facilitate interviews with additional staff if necessary.
* Ensure any staff we will be interviewing are available at the agreed time.

After the Review

It should be possible for us to provide some immediate feedback at the end of the visit day. We will then produce a summary report with our findings and any recommendations. This will come initially as a draft report. At that stage, it will be for the client to provide comments, feedback, or suggestions in terms of:

* Factual accuracy of the content of the report
* Suggestions for changes, amendments, or additions to the findings
* Suggestions in relation to the final recommendations

Trusts and schools should understand that the ERG process is two-way and collaborative and although judgmental by the review team, does allow the client to have objective input into the detail of the final report. However, this collaboration cannot change objective judgements where the evidence for those judgements cannot be reasonably challenged.

Review Days

The above review will be carried out on a basis of 3 or 5 days depending on the level of review required.