

# The Role of Governors and National Support for Them

**Paul Crisp**

Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education

[www.curee.co.uk](http://www.curee.co.uk)



National Leader of Governance

President  
Kennedy  
School



Building Brighter Futures

# Who am I to say?

- National Leader of Governance
- Chair: President Kennedy School
- Managing Director – Centre for the Use of Research & Evidence in Education (CUREE)
- Former college Vice Principal, leadership teacher/researcher and LEA officer





# What are we here for?



Local  
Worthies?



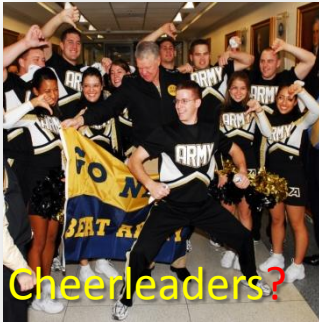
Inspectors?



Representatives?



Experts?



Cheerleaders?



Board of Directors?



Friends?





# New focus?



# Ofsted on the role

“ ..complements and enhances school leadership by providing **support and challenge**, ensuring that all statutory duties are met, appointing the headteacher and holding them to account for the impact of the school’s work on improving outcomes for all pupils ” [Ofsted 2011](#)

## Good governance

“fully involved in the school’s self-evaluation and use the knowledge gained to challenge the school, understand its strengths and weaknesses and contribute to shaping its strategic direction”

## Weak governance

“Fail[s] to ensure statutory requirements are met, for example those related to safeguarding. ... the involvement of governors in monitoring the quality of provision is not well enough defined or sufficiently rigorous and challenging”



# Some key features of good governance

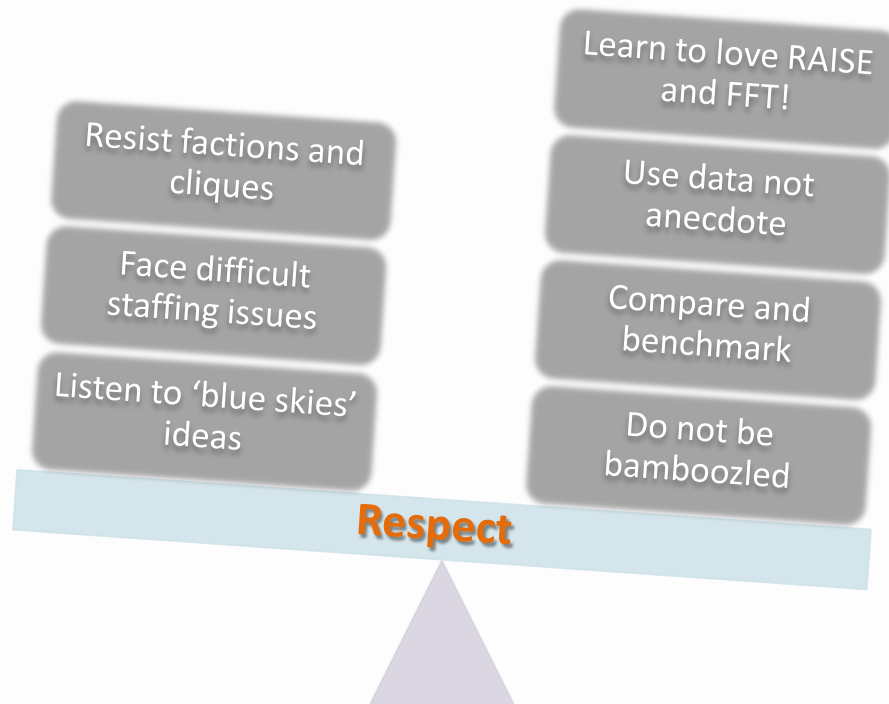
- Trust, openness and transparency – governors and leaders
- Well informed and supported by good data
- Encourages honest, insightful self-evaluation
- Takes and supports hard decisions where needed
- Clarity about boundary between strategic and executive
- Have personal experience of the school (visits, lesson observations etc)
- Efficient , well organised with good delegation



# Balancing support & challenge

Support

Challenge



# Governors' role in school improvement

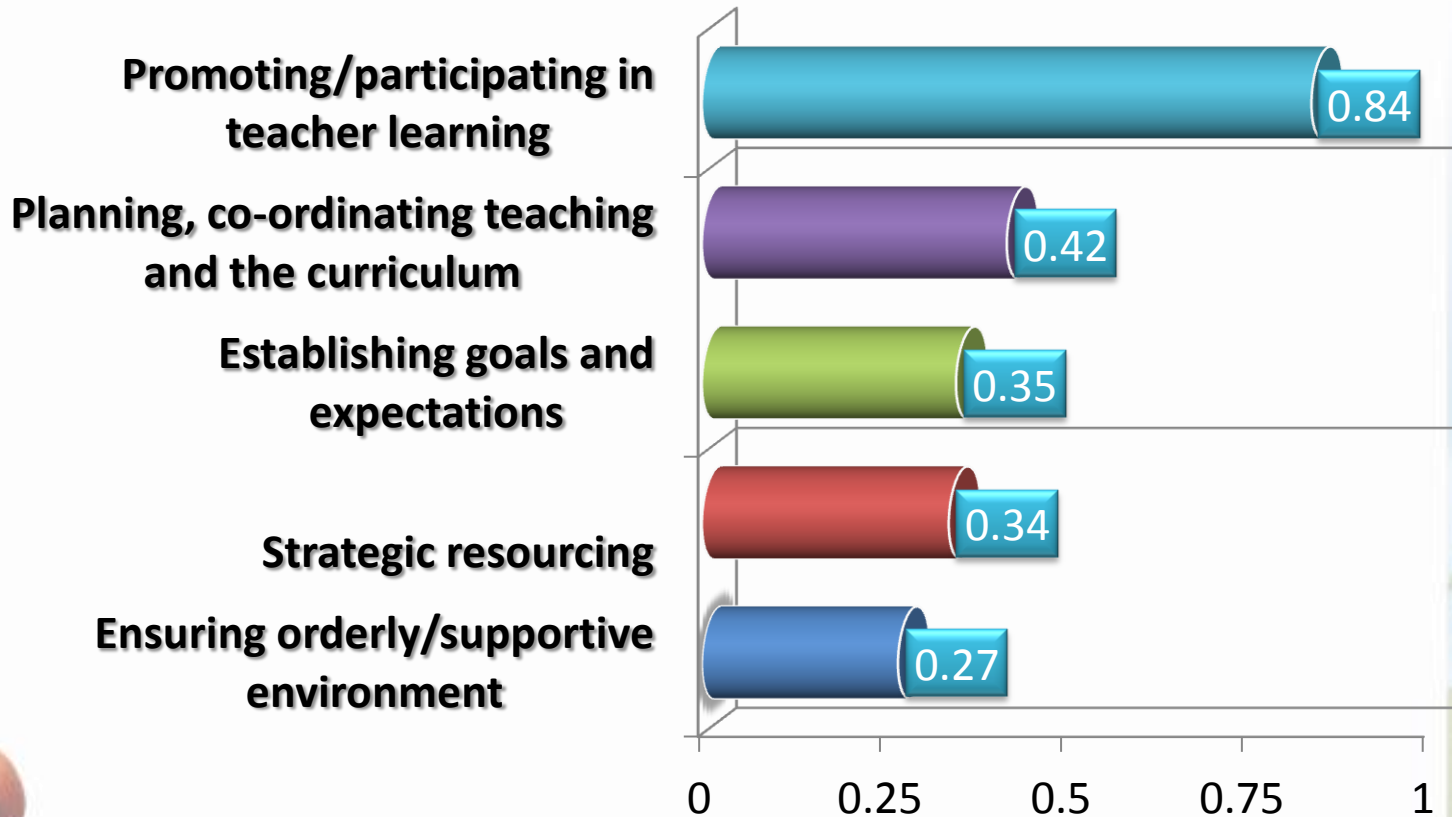
- Pupil achievement and wellbeing is strategic 'core business' of the school and **governors**
- Many contending 'magic bullet' models of school improvement
- Do governors have to be experts to choose the 'right' model?
- No – but...
- You have to be willing to grapple with the concepts and the evidence
- You cannot just leave it to the 'professionals'





# E.g. Leadership priorities

- Compelling evidence about the impact of leadership on pupil outcomes through:



# E.g. Programmes with proven impact

- Achievement for All – significant improvement for children with special needs in mainstream schools

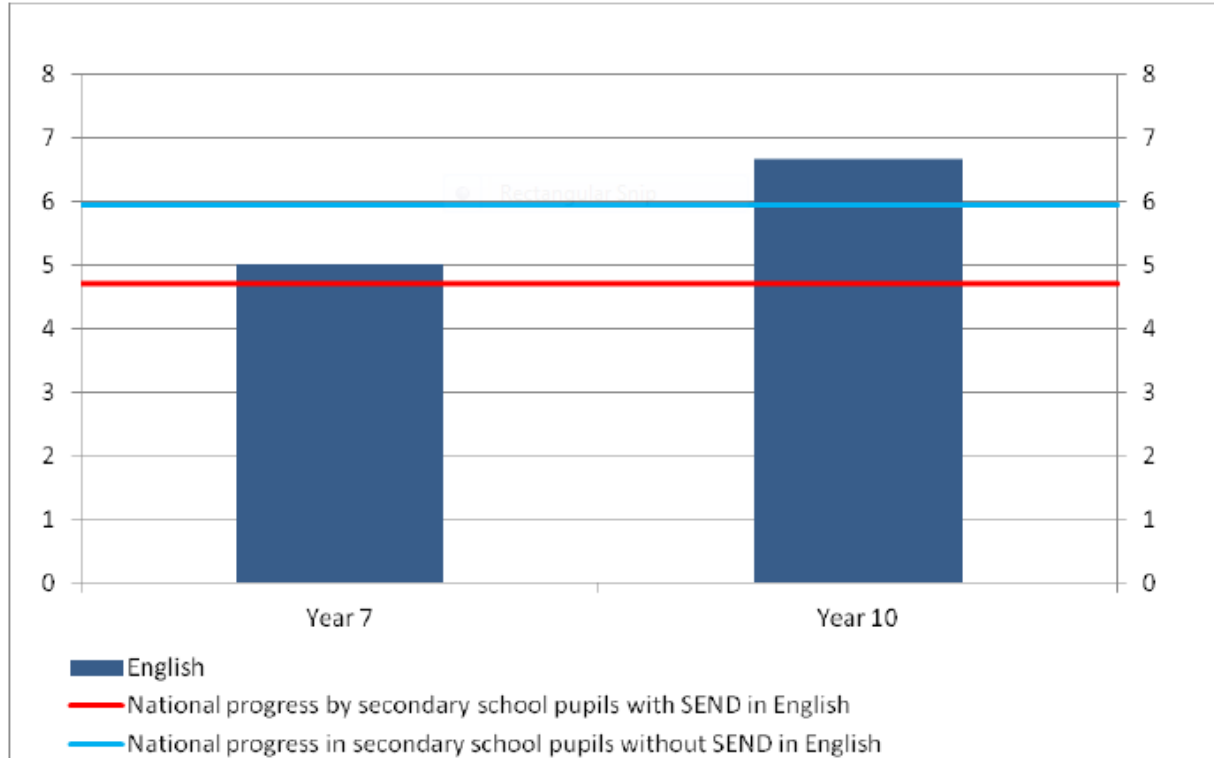


Figure 3 Mean point score progress in English in AfA secondary schools.



# E.g. CPD which improves pupil learning

Coherent international [evidence](#) that CPD for teachers benefits students if it is:

- ✎ collaborative – involves staff working together,
- ✎ supported by specialist expertise;
- ✎ focused on aspirations for students – which provides the moral imperative and shared focus;
- ✎ sustained over time;
- ✎ exploring evidence from trying new things to connect practice to concepts



# The jury – not the judge?

- Expect to have the approach explained so you can understand it
- If you don't understand it, it might not make sense
- Expect to see evidence of efficacy
- Ask the 'stupid question'
- Look at the data – wrestle with the numbers
- Demand tables, graphs and charts



# Where can I get support?

- **National Leaders of Governance ([NLG](#))**
- **Pilot reviews of governance**
- [Regional providers](#) of licensed CoG training
- On-line training (e.g. [GEL](#), [Modern Governor](#))
- Various on-line resources (e.g. [NCSL website](#), [DfE](#), [Clerk to Governors](#))
- Individual consultants
- Local authority governors' support service
- The Headteacher!



# What is a National Leader of Governance

According to NCSL:

*National Leaders of Governance are highly effective chairs of governors, who will use their skills and experience to support chairs of governors in schools and academies for a variety of reasons. The chair may be new, governors may want to focus more on school improvement, or need support in dealing with significant strategic challenges – for example becoming a federation or converting to academy status.*

Their role is to support CoGs and tend to work through:

- Coaching;
- Helping with understanding data;
- Providing additional information
- Brokering access to other support (usually via NCSL)



# What do they deal with?

- Most common issues are:
  - New chair finding his/her feet
  - Supporting chair of school in measures with weak or missing senior leadership
  - Developing effective challenge role (rather than just support)
  - Understanding data for challenge
  - Contemplating or undertaking structural change (e.g. Federations, academy)
  - Relationships with head
  - Relationships between governors
- *Available free on request to NCSL*



# Pilot reviews of governance

- Triggered by Ofsted grade 3 judgement (or worse)
- Particular findings of weakness in governance (as distinct from leadership)
- Review recommended by Inspector but non-mandatory [But would emerge as issue during monitoring]
- Designed as a 'supported self-review'
- Currently only for HMI led inspections
- In pilot until Summer (around 100 expected)
- Then predicting 400 per term





# Example of Ofsted recommendations

- Improve leadership and management at all levels, including leadership in the classroom, by:
- improving the rigour with which assessment records about pupils' learning and progress are collated, moderated and analysed
- using this improved information to analyse where further or different action is needed to enable pupils to learn more across the curriculum
- using a broad range of evidence to make robust judgements about the quality of teaching
- using this range of evidence to provide teachers and other staff with the appropriate level of training, support or challenge, according to their individual needs
- ensuring that governors receive accurate information about pupils' progress and teachers' performance so that they can challenge and support the school appropriately.
- **An external review of governance should be undertaken in order to assess how this aspect of leadership and governance may be improved.**



# Review process

Initial exploratory discussion to focus on key areas for action

Reviewer gathers data (documentary, discussion with CoG, Head , other governors)

The key foci will determine the kinds of evidence and process to follow

Feedback session with CoG, Head, other governors/SLT to set out:

- Areas for improvement
- Action plan

NLG produces short written report recording outcomes



# Benchmarks

- NLG's job includes helping governors review their performance against national benchmarks
- Governance graded Strong, Sound or Weak against 9 Criteria
  1. Vision, ethos, strategic direction
  2. Self evaluation
  3. Support and strengthen school leadership
  4. Challenge SLT on teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety
  5. Use of performance management systems
  6. Financial management
  7. Meet statutory duties
  8. Engage with stakeholders
  9. Use Pupil Premium etc to overcome barriers to learning



# Example criterion

Ofsted Evaluation Criterion	2. How well governors contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses
<p><b>Strong Governance</b> <i>all characteristics of 'sound' governance plus the following:</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Governors have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's overall performance.</li> <li>• Governors have an understanding of the data which they use to cross reference and challenge what they are told by school-leaders</li> <li>• Governors regularly evaluate their own effectiveness and this informs the evaluation of school leadership.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Sound Governance</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Headteacher provides GB with a range of information including external views and performance data to enable the governors to have confidence in the schools evaluation of its performance.</li> <li>• Governors have a balanced and accurate view of the schools main strengths and priorities for improvement.</li> <li>• The GB includes members with appropriate skills and understanding who have the ability to engage in self evaluation.</li> <li>• Governors' visits inform their knowledge of the school.</li> <li>• The School Development Plan (SDP) is clearly aligned to school self-evaluation and addresses any improvement priorities that have been identified.</li> <li>• The SDP indicates governor monitoring of progress in achieving key improvement priorities.</li> <li>• Minutes and discussions demonstrate that governors are using their time effectively to engage with school self-evaluation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Weak Governance</b></p>	<p>Governance in this area is weak if all of the characteristics of <i>sound governance</i> are not evident.</p>



# ... And finally

- If governors ever were *“local worthies who see being a governor as a badge of status”* they can't be any longer
- Government tending to view the Board as the directors (even in community schools) – and a review of governance currently under way
- Ofsted increasingly challenging governors' effectiveness in holding the school to account
- A wide array of support available but less and less of it free
- Governance has to be seen as a significant feature of school leadership and funded appropriately for e.g.:
  - Training
  - Specialist advice and consultancy
  - Professional support and administration





# Contact details

**Paul Crisp**

Managing Director

**Centre for the Use of Research  
& Evidence in Education**

4 Copthall House

Station Square

Coventry CV1 2FL UK

[paul.crisp@curee.co.uk](mailto:paul.crisp@curee.co.uk)

[www.curee.co.uk](http://www.curee.co.uk)

T: +44 (024) 7652 4036

F: +44 (024)7663 1646

