

Assurance framework for trust governance

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The voice of school trusts



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Bringing together trusts from every region and of every size, CST has a strong, strategic presence with access to government and policy makers to drive real change for education on the big issues that matter most.

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Assurance framework for trust governance

Introduction

School trusts are complex and agile organisations. The proposition of governance should therefore be a live conversation and boards should monitor and improve their performance continually. CST believes that there should be a requirement on boards in relation to assurance. The Financial Reporting Council's [Governance Code](#) recommends that FTSE 350 companies have external assurance in the form of an externally-facilitated board evaluation at least every three years.

We believe a three-year cycle of board assurance is an essential part of strong, strategic governance (and should form part of the government's approach to strong trusts):

- Years one and two – internal assurance conducted by a governance professional or similar role or through peer review.
- Year three – external assurance facilitated by a credible organisation with strong quality assurance arrangements to validate the review of governance. This is particularly important before the board undertakes any significant change.

As part of our [Essential Trustee programme](#), participating boards can be supported to undertake this assurance process, in addition to wider the programme content.

Ann Gravells' (2020) definition of quality assurance may be helpful:

"Quality Assurance is a system to monitor and evaluate a service that should identify and recommend measures to make improvements to standards and performance."

She is also clear that assurance seeks to avoid problems, stabilise, and improve services by monitoring them on an ongoing basis. Gravell says this is about "having systems in place to ensure that the teaching, learning and assessment processes are valid and reliable, and that they have been undertaken with integrity."

There is an imperative implicit in this definition that assurance should translate into action. Boards may wish to consider a wider approach to assurance than just external reviews of governance:

Review of people and individual roles:

- 360-review of the chair
- Individual trustee review
- Review of the governance professional role
- Trustee skills audits

Review of systems and policies

- Compliance with the [Academy Trust Handbook](#)
- Adoption of the [Academy Trust Governance Code](#)
- Review of your own governance documents

Governance reviews

- Internal reviews conducted by a governance professional or peer review
- External reviews of governance – we recommend that these are conducted by a credible third party organisation with sound processes for quality assurance.



CST support for board assurance

CST specialises in trust governance. Our expert trust development services, which include external reviews of governance, draws on the daily experience of CST as the national organisation and sector body for school trusts.

The [Academy trust governance guide](#) (DfE 2024) sets out the knowledge, skills and behaviours required to be a governor or trustee. However, trustees are more than a loose group of knowledgeable, skilled and capable people working together. They also form a corporate entity – the trust board. CST’s assurance framework simplifies the competencies as a basis for trust boards to assess their corporate capacity and effectiveness.

This framework should be read alongside CST’s [Governing a school trust](#) guidance. It draws on our concept of trusts as new civic structures with responsibilities to work with partners and other civic actors to advance education in the public interest in a locality or region.

The four domains and 20 elements of assurance framework for trust governance

Board leadership	1. Purpose and direction 2. Culture and values 3. People and workforce – being a good employer 4. Making good decisions 5. The civic role of trusts and community anchoring
Structures	6. Significant separation 7. Division of responsibilities 8. Local governance 9. Scheme of delegation 10. Succession, appointments, and diversity
Accountability	11. Educational quality and improvement across the group of schools 12. Fiduciary duty and financial strategy 13. Audit, risk and internal control 14. Setting remuneration 15. External accountability
Compliance	16. Acting within powers 17. Regularity, propriety and value for money 18. Conflicts of interest and related party transactions 19. Safety and safeguarding, welfare and wellbeing 20. Care, skills and diligence

How to use this framework

For each of the 20 elements, the framework identifies questions to start with as well as descriptions of what strong and weaker assurance would look like in a trust at board level.

Use the questions and descriptions to rate your trust against each element along a four-point scale:

- Red (needs attention)
- Amber red
- Amber green
- Green (strong capacity).

Descriptions have deliberately not been provided for the 'amber red' and 'amber green' ratings. If you think that your trust matches neither the 'red' nor the 'green' description, think about which end of the scale it is closer to, and choose the appropriate rating. The right-hand column has space to mark your rating and make some brief notes about your rationale for choosing that rating. You should note evidence that supports your rationale.

This framework is diagnostic, not evaluative or judgemental. The aim is to identify your trust's most significant areas of strength and challenge, so that you can build your capacity for governance improvement. A 'green' rating does not mean that an element is currently perfect, just that it is an area of strength upon which to build. Likewise, a 'red' rating does not imply failure, it simply highlights an area where capacity building or improvement should be a priority for the trust.

Priorities for improvement and action planning

As well as capturing the overall scores from your self-assessment you may also find it helpful to make a note of the key issues you identified for each of the priority areas and start to identify the actions you plan to take to address these issues. This is not intended to be about documenting evidence or 'proving' compliance, rather an *aide memoire* for understanding your rating and the areas to focus on.



Board leadership

1. Purpose and direction

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board have a shared understanding of, and commitment to, the trust's charitable purposes and can individual trustees articulate these clearly?</p> <p>Can the board demonstrate that the trust is effective in achieving its charitable purposes and agreed outcomes?</p> <p>How does the trust meet its equalities objectives and ensure a laser-like focus on equality, diversity and inclusion?</p> <p>Does the board have a strategy that aligns with the trust's charitable objects?</p> <p>Is the board clear about its ambitions and trajectory for growth or indeed whether it wishes to consolidate rather than grow?</p> <p>Does the board intentionally build relationships with regulators (ESFA and DfE regional director?)</p> <p>Does the strategy include an ambition to contribute to wider system capacity and the common good?</p> <p>Is there a balance between the focus on immediate issues and long-term success?</p> <p>What proportion of board time is spent on financial performance management versus other matters of strategic importance?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not have a shared understanding of the trust's charitable purposes. ▪ Does not meet its requirements in relation to equalities legislation ▪ Is too involved and/or lost in the operational detail ▪ Has no strategy ▪ Is led by the executive ▪ Has an undue focus on short-term time horizons 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a shared understanding of the trust's charitable purposes. ▪ Has a clear focus on equality, diversity and inclusion. ▪ Thinks strategically ▪ Sets direction ▪ Agrees a strategy ▪ Plans, prioritises, monitors progress ▪ Focuses on sustainability with a long-term orientation 	

Board leadership

2. Culture and values

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>How consistent is the trust's strategy with the organisation's purpose, values and culture, and responsibilities for long-term success?</p> <p>To what extent is the board's own way of operating a reflection of the values the organisation is promoting?</p> <p>How does the board demonstrate ethical leadership and display the behaviours expected from others?</p> <p>What does the workforce say about the 'tone from the top?'</p> <p>What steps has the board taken to ensure that suppliers meet expected standards of behaviour?</p> <p>How does the board undertake its role as an employer in relation to equality, diversity and inclusion in its workforce?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decisions and behaviours do not align with the organisation's stated values and ethos ▪ Fails to recognise the consequences of running the organisation based on self-interest and other poor ethical standards ▪ Is characterised by an absence of trust, with factions or individuals dominating ▪ Is characterised by fear of conflict, seeking artificial harmony rather constructive debate ▪ Is dominated by complacent or intransigent attitudes 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Determines organisational values and culture ▪ Ensures conduct and operation of the board and wider organisation embodies culture, values, ethos ▪ Is honest, reflective and self-critical ▪ Demonstrates professional ethics, values and sound judgement ▪ Had taken steps to ensure that suppliers meet ethical standards ▪ Has a clear focus as on equality, diversity and inclusion. 	

Board leadership

3. People, and workforce – being a good employer

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>How does the board execute its responsibilities as an employer? How does it ensure that the trust is a great place to work?</p> <p>Is there a written people strategy? Does it include a focus on professional development as a strategic improvement initiative?</p> <p>What steps have our executive leaders taken to communicate values and expected behaviours widely and clearly across all our schools?</p> <p>How have the values and expected behaviours been reinforced in our recruitment, promotion, reward, performance management and other policies, processes and practices?</p> <p>What does staff wellbeing look like in the trust?</p> <p>How does the trust promote flexible working?</p> <p>What does the board know about workload in its schools, and how does the board ensure that leaders, teachers and staff have a manageable workload?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a poor reputation as an employer ▪ Does not have a written people strategy ▪ Does not understand its employer duties ▪ Does not test the alignment between culture, values and operational processes ▪ Does not know what the workforce thinks about the “tone from the top” 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a reputation for being a good employer ▪ Has a written people strategy ▪ Actively consider the wellbeing of staff ▪ Ensures that policy and practice align with the organisation’s culture, values and ethos ▪ Has evidence from the workforce ▪ Monitors workload 	

Board leadership

4. Making good decisions

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>How does the board ensure its main focus is on strategy, performance and assurance, rather than operational matters?</p> <p>Does the board have a sound decision-making and monitoring framework which helps the trust deliver its charitable purposes?</p> <p>Have relevant members of the executive team been invited to explain the issues at the earlier stages, enabling all trustees to share concerns or challenge assumptions well before the point of decision?</p> <p>Does the board have a well-established process for identifying, and does it understand, the reporting arrangements for related party transactions?</p> <p>Does the board have a process for considering the impact on key stakeholders and/or taking consultation with stakeholders into account?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takes decisions that result in financial or other material benefits for members, trustees, their families or friends ▪ Fails to put aside vested or personal interests to make decisions that are in the best interests of all pupils ▪ Attempts to avoid external scrutiny or reporting ▪ Fails to listen to and act upon concerns that are raised 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Takes decisions in an open and transparent manner and in the public interest ▪ Takes decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias ▪ Knows when to seek advice ▪ Is comfortable submitting itself to external scrutiny ▪ Is truthful in its actions, decision and reporting and demonstrates the highest standards of public life 	

Board leadership

5. The civic role of trusts and community anchoring

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust anchor its strategy in the needs of its schools, the communities they serve, and the wider educational system in line with its charitable objects?</p> <p>Does the board have a strong process for community and stakeholder involvement?</p> <p>Can the board explain how the impact on key stakeholders has been taken into account in key decisions?</p> <p>How does the board demonstrate that it takes seriously its responsibility for building public trust and confidence in its work?</p> <p>How does the trust demonstrate it is accountable first and foremost to the communities it serves?</p> <p>Is the trust seen to have legitimacy in representing its pupils, parents and carers, staff, and wider communities?</p> <p>Does the board understand its wider civic responsibilities, and work in partnership to build relations across the local education community?</p> <p>How does your trust reflect its commitment to civic leadership?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is disconnected from the parent body and the community ▪ Is isolationist ▪ Is reticent and/or secretive ▪ Is not seen to have legitimacy in representing its pupils, parents and carers, staff and wider communities 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Actively seeks out and understands the views and needs of pupils, parents and carers, staff, and its local communities ▪ Enables productive relationships ▪ Builds trust and shared ownership ▪ Works in partnership with other civic actors to advance education for the public good ▪ Is credible, open and honest ▪ Is seen to have legitimacy in representing its pupils, parents and carers, staff and wider communities 	

Structures of governance

6. Significant separation

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the trust have at least three members (although the DfE's strong preference is that trusts should have at least five members)?</p> <p>Is there significant separation between members and trustees?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place to keep members informed so that they can exercise their powers where necessary to further the academy trust's charitable purpose?</p> <p>Is there significant separation between the trust board and any local tiers of governance?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place to ensure good communication between the tiers of governance?</p> <p>Does the trust provide details of its governance arrangements in its accounts and on its website, including the structure and remit of the members, board of trustees, committees, the trust's scheme of delegation and information for each trustee and local governor serving at any point over the past 12 months?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not understand its roles and responsibilities and operates as if it were the governing body in a maintained school ▪ Has no separation between members and trustees or between trustees and local governance ▪ Has no effective systems of communications between layers of governance ▪ Does not execute strategic oversight of committees 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has strong knowledge of trust governance corporately and individually ▪ Has significant separation between members and trustees and between trustees and academy committees ▪ Has effective systems of communication between layers of governance ▪ Executes strategic oversight of committees 	

Structures of governance

7. Divisions of responsibility

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Do those responsible for governance at all levels understand their roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities?</p> <p>Does the board hold executive leaders to account for the effective implementation of the trust strategy and operating plan, including in relation to the use of resources and the drivers of impact?</p> <p>Are the board papers accurate and clear, and in a form and of a quality and comprehensiveness that will enable the board to discharge its duties?</p> <p>Does the board foster a culture where constructive challenge is welcomed; thinking is diverse; a variety of experiences and perspectives are welcomed; and continuous improvement is the norm?</p> <p>Is the board culture that of minimal internal politics, minimal confusion, a balance of support and challenge, high morale, and a focus on what matters most?</p> <p>Does the board understand the role of the governance professional as in-house counsel and advisor?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encroaches into operational activity and transgresses the boundary between executive and non-executive roles ▪ Challenge is ineffective or over-zealous ▪ Has a toxic culture where internal politics, confusion, low morale and low trust are evident 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has clarity about division of responsibilities ▪ Does not overstep the executive/non-executive boundary ▪ Fosters a culture of constructive challenge ▪ Has a healthy culture of minimal internal politics, minimal confusion, a balance of support and challenge, high morale, and a focus on what matters most 	

Structures of governance

8. Delegations

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Is there a published scheme of delegation that details the full range of delegations required by the Academy Trust Handbook? (see CST's scheme of delegation checklists)</p> <p>Has the scheme of delegation been formally approved by the trust board?</p> <p>Is the scheme of delegation reviewed at least annually?</p> <p>Is there a finance committee and is there evidence that the finance committee is effective in relation to financial scrutiny?</p> <p>Is there an audit and risk committee separate from the finance committee where the trust's income is over £50 million?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has no scheme of delegation and/or does not understand where decisions are made Has no finance committee and no audit and risk committee 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a clear scheme of delegation that is widely known, understood and used Reviews its scheme of delegation annually Has a clear and effective committee structure including finance and separately, audit and risk 	

Structures of governance

9. Local governance

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Are the delegations to any local tier of governance clear in the scheme of delegation and are these delegations reflected in terms of reference (where these exist)?</p> <p>Is there absolute clarity on the role and remit of each part of the governance structure and the relationship and reporting arrangements between them?</p> <p>Does everyone in the governance community (including trustees and those responsible for the executing the local tier of governance) understand what governance functions, if any, are delegated? Where governance functions are not delegated, is there a clear remit for the local tier of governance?</p> <p>How does the trust board maintain relationships and communication with the local tier of governance? Are the processes for communication and oversight of the work of local governance by the trust board clear?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is unclear about the purpose, role and functions of local governance ▪ Has failed to ensure clarity so there is duplication of effort and function in the governance structure ▪ Has no mechanisms for maintaining relationships with local governance so there is little trust and possibly infighting 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is crystal clear about the purpose, role and functions of local governance ▪ Has ensured that there is no duplication of effort and that everyone understands their role and remit ▪ Has good mechanisms for communications so there are healthy relationships and a high level of trust at all levels of governance – everyone is pulling in the same direction 	

Structures of governance

10. Succession, appointments, and diversity

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Has the board assessed what knowledge-domains and skill sets are required when recruiting trustees?</p> <p>Has the board reassessed its make-up as a result of growth/changes and emerging trends?</p> <p>Has the board taken account of the knowledge and technical skills required by its committees when recruiting trustees?</p> <p>Does the trust have a transparent appointment process for new trustees?</p> <p>Does the appointment process comply with the trust's articles of association?</p> <p>How are conflicts of interest tested through the appointments process?</p> <p>How is consideration given to diversity, including diversity of thought, perspectives and views, during the appointment process?</p> <p>How does the board guard against becoming self-appointing and perpetuating?</p> <p>Is there a proper induction process for new members, trustees, and committee members?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is unclear about the knowledge and skills currently on the board and/or required for effective governance of a school trust ▪ Has no transparent appointment process, and/or is a self-perpetuating group of 'mates' ▪ Fails to test conflicts through the appointment process ▪ Lacks diversity of any kind and/or has no plans to build a diverse board through succession planning ▪ Has no induction processes for members, trustees, and committee members 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is crystal clear about the knowledge and skills required for effective governance and has a strong understanding of the constitution of the board ▪ Has a transparent process for appointments that is compliant with its articles of association ▪ Tests conflicts of interest through the appointment process ▪ Is diverse in its membership and/or conscious of the need to build a diverse board through succession planning ▪ Has robust processes for induction at all levels of governance 	

Accountability

11. Educational quality and improvement

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board have sufficient education expertise to hold the executive team to account for the quality of education in its widest sense (for example, attendance and exclusions, attainment and progress, curriculum and assessment, safeguarding and well-being)?</p> <p>Is information on education quality in a form and of a quality and comprehensiveness that will enable it to discharge its duties?</p> <p>Does the trust have a published school improvement strategy that is understood at board level?</p> <p>Is there a strong, evidence-informed professional development programme across the group of schools and evidence of improvements in the quality of teaching?</p> <p>Does the board know and understand the organisation's curriculum philosophy, the rationale for this and the importance of a broad and balanced curriculum?</p> <p>Does the trust have a broad, ambitious and truly inclusive approach to education, including expert and rigorous teaching for children with SEND?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has insufficient knowledge and ability to test underlying assumptions about the process of improvement and is unable to challenge effectively ▪ Has insufficient knowledge and ability to test underlying assumptions about the curriculum and is unable to challenge ▪ Has insufficient knowledge about published data and/or assessment data to test underlying assumptions and is unable to challenge effectively ▪ Has inadequate information or analysis/poor quality papers/insufficient notice ▪ Fails to challenge a lack of openness by the executive 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sets clear expectations re the process of improvement and intended outcomes ▪ Defines the range and format of information and data needed in order to hold executive leaders to account ▪ Understands the curriculum design and intent and can rigorously question implementation and impact ▪ Uses published data to understand which areas of performance need improvement ▪ Questions the executive on whether they are collecting the right data 	

Accountability

12. Fiduciary duty and financial governance

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board know and understand its fiduciary duties?</p> <p>Does the board have in place financial policies and procedures including mechanisms for ensuring financial accountability?</p> <p>Does the board have strong internal control processes to ensure propriety and value for public money?</p> <p>Is there evidence of good financial oversight by the board?</p> <p>Are basic control principles in place?</p> <p>Are spending and procurement decisions compliant and well-managed?</p> <p>Does the board know how the financial health and efficiency of the organisation compares with similar organisations locally and nationally?</p> <p>Does the board routinely consider ESFA Dear Accounting Officer letters and take appropriate action to strengthen financial controls?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has insufficient knowledge about financial framework or accountability to test underlying assumptions and is unable to challenge effectively ▪ Has insufficient or no financial controls in place ▪ Has no process for, or attention to resource allocation ▪ Has insufficient financial knowledge and is unable to challenge effectively ▪ Has inadequate information or analysis, poor quality papers, or insufficient notice to make good decisions 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures integrity of financial information received by the board ▪ Establishes robust financial controls ▪ Is rigorous in questioning whether enough is being done to drive efficiency and align budgets to educational priorities ▪ Assimilates financial implications of priorities and use this to make decisions about funding ▪ Interprets financial data and asks informed questions about income, expenditure and resource allocation and alignment with the strategic plan priorities 	

Accountability

13. Audit, risk, and internal control

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Are the trust board's arrangements for internal scrutiny secure and compliant?</p> <p>Is there a written risk register maintained by the board covering the full operations and activities of the trust, not only financial risks?</p> <p>Does the programme of internal scrutiny include financial and non-financial items and informed by the risk register?</p> <p>Is the programme of work spread appropriately over the year so higher risk areas are reviewed in good time?</p> <p>Are there adequate internal controls over risk?</p> <p>Is sufficient time allocated on the board agenda to enable a full discussion of the work of the audit and risk committee?</p> <p>How has the board assessed whether the audit committee has a balance of skills and competencies necessary to fulfil its remit?</p> <p>Are there clear procedures and triggers in place to elevate risks to the board quickly?</p> <p>Does the board ensure that there is an appropriate, reasonable and timely response to findings by external auditors?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has no process for internal scrutiny or it is not compliant Has no risk register or treats the risk register as a static document to be reviewed perhaps once a year Focuses excessively on risk mitigation or gives insufficient attention to risk Controls over risk are inadequate 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a robust and compliant process for internal scrutiny Knows the principles and processes of risk management Identifies, evaluates, mitigates, and monitors risk, including a full risk review at least annually Ensures risks are aligned with strategic priorities Avoids conflicts of interest 	

Accountability

14. Setting remuneration

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>How does the board ensure its decisions about levels of executive pay (including salary and any other benefits) follow a robust evidence-based process and are a reasonable and defensible reflection of the individual's role and responsibilities?</p> <p>Is there sufficient documentation setting out the rationale behind the decision-making process, including whether the level of pay and benefits reflects value for money?</p> <p>Is any individual involved in deciding their own remuneration – or any person or trustee who may have conflicts of loyalty to an individual?</p> <p>How is executive remuneration aligned with the trust's wider pay policy?</p> <p>How does the trust's pay policy address pay gaps and pay ratios between the different quartiles of the workforce, including action to reduce the gender pay gap?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has no process for making decisions about remuneration, pay policy or executive pay ▪ Individuals are involved in decisions about their pay ▪ Fails to make sure that executive pay is aligned with wider pay policy ▪ Pays no regard to the gender pay gap 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a committee that is set up for the purposes of overseeing remuneration, pay policy and decisions about executive pay ▪ Ensures decisions about executive pay are evidence-informed and well documented ▪ Make certain that no individual is involved in decisions about their pay ▪ Ensures executive pay is aligned with wider pay policy ▪ Has a commitment to addressing the gender pay gap 	

Accountability

15. External accountability

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board know and understand the purpose, nature and processes of formal accountability and scrutiny (such as DfE regional directors, ESFA, and Ofsted) and what is required by way of evidence?</p> <p>Does the board embrace the principle of transparency and is it comfortable submitting itself to external scrutiny?</p> <p>Does the board consciously and purposefully build relationships with regulators?</p> <p>Does the board ensure swift action is taken in relation to regulatory activity and findings?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Avoids accountability and/or blames someone else (government or regulators) ▪ Ducks responsibility to challenge leaders on counter-productive behaviours which sets low standards 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ensures systems are in place to meet the demands of scrutiny ▪ Ensures the board is accessible and answerable to parents, carers and the community. ▪ Uses relevant information to present verbal and written responses to external scrutiny 	

Compliance

16. Acting within powers

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Is the board corporately and are trustees individually cognisant of their duties to act within powers?</p> <p>Does the board ensure that it complies at all times with its articles of association?</p> <p>Does the board seek independent advice where necessary?</p> <p>Does the board corporately and do individual trustees always act exclusively in the trust's best interests?</p> <p>Does the board welcome accountability as an opportunity not a burden?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not know or understand its legal responsibilities and accountabilities ▪ Is non-compliant in one or more ways ▪ Fails to seek specialist help and advice 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Knows its legal responsibilities and accountabilities ▪ Identifies when specialist advice may be required ▪ Identifies non-compliance and takes action to resolve it 	

Compliance

17. Regularity, propriety and value for money

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>How does the board ensure that funding is spent for the purpose intended by Parliament?</p> <p>How does it ensure that expenditure and receipts are in accordance with Parliament's intentions?</p> <p>What mechanisms are in place to ensure the best possible educational and wider societal outcomes through the economic, efficient and effective use of all the resources in the trust?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has very little sense of public sector values, is self-interested or isolationist ▪ Has very few, ineffective or no controls in relation to regularity, propriety and value for money 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Exercises knowledge and understanding of public sector values ▪ Has strong controls in relation to regularity, propriety and value for money 	

Compliance

18. Conflicts of interest and related party transactions

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board maintain a register of interests and loyalty and avoid or manage these honestly and purposefully?</p> <p>Does the board have effective mechanisms for addressing conflicts of interest and conflicts of loyalty where these arise?</p> <p>Does the board know and understand the regulatory requirements related to related party transactions?</p> <p>Is the trust compliant in relation to seeking approval for and reporting related party transactions?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not maintain a register of interests or does not manage these actively ▪ Is non-compliant with processes in relation to related party transactions ▪ Is unduly influenced by the interests of other people or organisations in decision-making ▪ Takes decisions to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, family, or friends 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintains a register of interests and manages these actively ▪ Is compliant with processes in relation to related party transactions ▪ Is not unduly influenced by other people or organisations in decision making ▪ Has not acted to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, family, or friends 	

Compliance

19. Safety and safeguarding, welfare and wellbeing

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>What assurance mechanisms and processes are in place in relation to compliance with safeguarding and health and safety regulations and requirements?</p> <p>How does the trust ensure the promotion of the welfare and wellbeing of children, young people, and staff?</p> <p>How does the board ensure safeguarding and safety risks are managed, mitigated, and tested as part of internal audit?</p> <p>How does the board assure itself that staff receive appropriate, regular safeguarding and child protection training?</p> <p>Does the board maintain strategic oversight of safeguarding processes and working between schools, colleges and local multi-agency partners?</p> <p>How does the board assure itself that appropriate arrangements are in place with regard to sexual abuse?</p> <p>Has the board received assurance that an appropriate relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) curriculum is in place across all schools in the trust?</p> <p>Does the board assure itself that safeguarding arrangements include listening to the voices of children when reporting sexual abuse whether occurring within or outside school and that victims receive timely and appropriate support?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Does not know or understand safeguarding or health and safety statutory requirements ▪ Has no assurance processes in place to review compliance with statutory safeguarding or health and safety requirements) ▪ Does not give sufficient time and attention to safeguarding and safety or reports are treated in a cursory manner ▪ Has little regard for the welfare of pupils and staff 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has secure knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and health and safety requirements ▪ Has robust assurance processes in place to review compliance with statutory safeguarding and health and safety requirements ▪ Seeks external advice where appropriate ▪ Ensures there is a strong strategic focus on promoting the welfare and wellbeing of pupils and staff 	

Compliance

20. Care, skill, and diligence – the bond of trust

Questions to consider	(Red) Needs attention:	(Green) Strong looks like:	Current rating and notes
<p>Does the board in all its decisions and actions exercise reasonable care, skill, and diligence?</p> <p>Does the board put the charitable object of advancing education at the heart of governance?</p> <p>Does the board understand and accept the bond of trust it holds with children?</p>	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Neglects its duty to exercises care, skill and diligence in its actions and decisions. ▪ Shows little cognisance of its core charitable purpose and does not execute this purpose with intent. 	<p>The board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has a strong moral and ethical sense of its responsibilities and exercises care, skill and diligence in all its actions and decisions. ▪ Puts the duty to advance education at the centre of all its activities. 	





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