

The School Improvement Cycle

Part of the Governor Services *Introduction to Governance* Series

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**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

The role of governors

Governors have a vital part to play in driving school improvement as this process supports the **three core functions** of governance.

These core functions are:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

You can find out more about these core functions in the Governance Handbook produced by the Department for Education (DfE) by clicking on the link:

**Governance
Handbook**



GOVERNOR
SERVICES



Areas of work

There are two main areas of work for any governing board:

Statutory responsibilities

This work is linked to all the legal responsibilities and statutory guidance around schools. It includes areas such as health and safety; employment; safeguarding; complaints and equality. All schools have these responsibilities.

Usually, this takes about a third of the Board's time.

School improvement work

This is based on the premise that schools are best placed to identify areas for improvement and to implement changes that can bring about better outcomes for all pupils. As such, this work is personal to the school and the focus of this training.

This usually takes about two thirds of the Board's time.



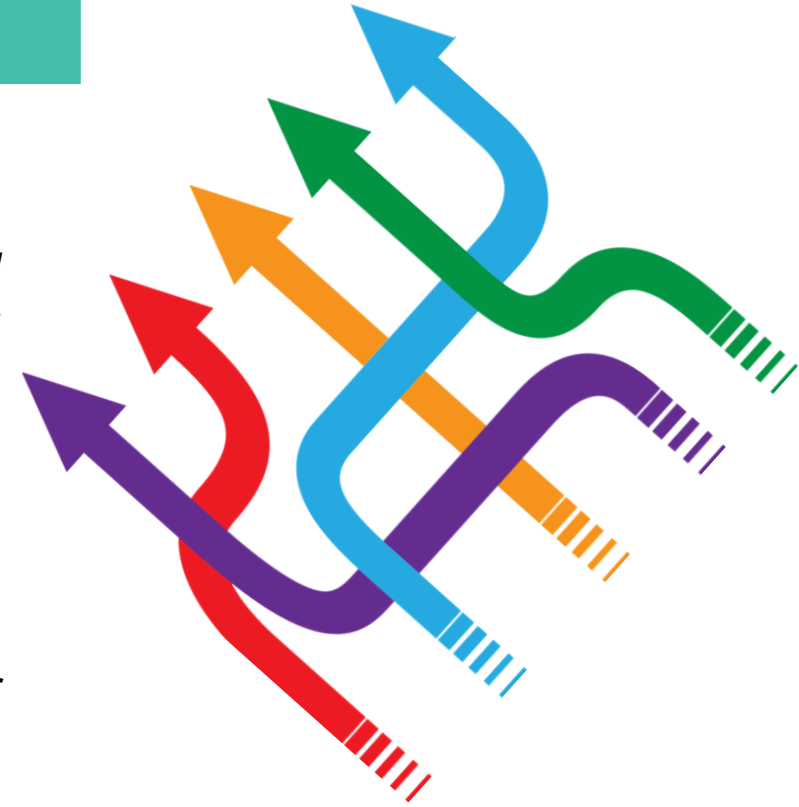
The role of the board 1

By driving school improvement, the board is ensuring the **strategic direction** of the school is clear to all.

The school knows the next steps it needs to take to reach its vision, and has agreed a clear plan to ensure this has the best chance of being realised.

The school improvement cycle clarifies the priorities for the executive leaders and provides a structure for **challenge and support** within the school.

Governor monitoring and evaluation will focus on this plan to ensure progress is having the desired impact. The appraisal objectives for teachers and the headteacher will be linked to these priorities so everyone knows what needs to happen to make the plan successful.



The role of the board 2

The school improvement cycle also ensures the board **agrees a balanced budget** that **supports the school's vision** and results in improved outcomes for all pupils.

The improvement plan should be linked to the budget which is agreed by the board. If the budget does not support the plan, improvement is less likely.

School improvement work is driven by the **vision for the school**.

- Do you know the vision for your school or trust?
- Could you articulate it to others?
- Do you understand why it was chosen?

If you are not familiar with your school vision, look on your school website or ask the chair for more details. Without this understanding, you will not be able to contribute to the board as effectively.

*More information about vision is available in the **Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction** module from this series*



School improvement cycle

School improvement work needs to be **targeted**. This is because the school has a limited budget and staff team.

Tackling everything at once would risk:

- A loss of focus
- Excess stress for staff and the school community
- Confusion about the impact of any changes

The cycle should address the **major problems or concerns** of the school at the time and should use the **available resources**.

All schools, even outstanding schools, will have areas that can be developed to improve the experiences and outcomes for all children.



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Reflection

List three things about your school that you would improve.

- Why did you choose these areas?
- What evidence did you use? Is this evidence reliable?
- How much would your changes cost?
- What benefit should there be for the pupils?
- How will you know your changes have been successful?

This activity is difficult if you do not know your school.

The quickest way to know your school is to visit while the school is open, look at the current school information, talk to other governors, listen to views from your parents, staff and pupils and get involved in the process of school improvement.



Strengths and weaknesses



To start the school improvement process, the Board needs a shared understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

This is usually recorded in the school **self-evaluation form** (or SEF).

This key document is drafted by the headteacher (in consultation with the staff) and is discussed, amended and agreed by the board.

This document records the school's evaluation of itself, the reasons for this and the evidence used to make this judgement



Self-evaluation form

The SEF should direct the school towards the board's vision. It is often arranged around the Ofsted areas of:

Overall effectiveness
the umbrella judgement

- Quality of education
- Behaviour and attitudes
- Personal development
- Leadership and management

The SEF may also include information about the Early Years and the Sixth-form if the school has either of these provisions.

[Ofsted
Inspection
Handbook](#)

Information about the Ofsted judgements can be found here:

How do your school's SEF judgements compare to the grade descriptors from the Ofsted Handbook?

What are the key priorities for improvement at your school?



Contributing to the SEF



Governors should use a **wide range of information** to inform the self-evaluation

This evidence might include:

- Information from pupil, parent and staff questionnaires or surveys
- Internal information such as performance data, attendance information and pupil numbers
- External reports from, for example, Ofsted, the local authority, diocese or trust
- Governor monitoring information
- External performance data (to compare the school to local and national levels)
- Budget monitoring and benchmarking information

The SEF is usually **agreed once a year**, but **it should be reviewed throughout the year**.

If the school is improving, the SEF should reflect this improvement; in this way, the SEF stays up to date and relevant.



Governor role in the process



How does your board contribute to the school's self-evaluation process?

You could consider:

- How often governors have the opportunity to discuss and agree the SEF
- What evidence governors use to inform the SEF
- How regularly governors review the SEF during the school year
- How new governors are introduced to the SEF
- How useful the SEF is in the school improvement cycle



SWOT analysis



A simple and effective way for governors to consider the strengths and weaknesses of their school is by undertaking a **SWOT analysis**.

This uses information about the school (such as the headteacher's report to governors, a newsletter, or the latest Ofsted report) and asks for the identification of any strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats suggested by the information.

While this only suggests areas of strength and weakness, it promoted discussion and links with evidence from other sources to form a **robust board view**. It also allows governors to consider how any opportunities could be utilised and any threats could be mitigated for their school.



Extract from the headteacher's report to governors:

Spend a few minutes considering the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats suggested by this information.

Area	Update
Early Years (EYFS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 19 school place offers (for 30 vacancies); 16 were first choice• 95% of children achieved the Good Level of Development (65% nationally)• School was externally moderated: all judgements were accurate
Key Stage 1 (Year 1-2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 7 children have left KS1 this term: 3 to be home educated; 2 moving area and 2 to independent schools• In Yr 2, 24% achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths (55% nationally)• Both teachers are leaving this term. Agency and supply staff will be used to cover until recruitment.
Key Stage 2 (Year 3-6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2 children have joined Yr5 and Yr6 on managed moves (to avoid permanent exclusion). They have settled quickly with no issues over the past 8 weeks• In Yr 6, 88% achieved the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths (59% nationally)



SWOT analysis outcome

This is one example of a SWOT analysis using the information. How did your ideas match or differ?

Strengths

- Early Years outcomes and provision strong
- KS2 outcomes strong
- 16/19 reception families named the school as first choice
- Provision for *managed move* children is effective (KS2)

Opportunities

- Staff leaving KS1; recruitment opportunities
- Successful Early Years pupils moving into Year 1
- Stable, successful KS2 and Reception staff

Weaknesses

- Key Stage 1 provision and outcomes
- Reduced budget (as pupil numbers drop)
- Higher agency or supply costs

Threats

- Reputation of the school in the community (Poor KS1 results; families leaving; reception under subscribed)
- Use of supply/agency staff on school improvement pace
- Recruitment- lack of high quality staff in expensive area



Swot activity

Using your latest headteacher's report, spend five minutes completing a simple SWOT analysis for your school.

Now look at your school's SEF.

- How does your SWOT analysis compare to your school's SEF?
- Have you identified the same strengths and weaknesses?
- Are there any questions raised that would help you understand the school more fully?



Extract from a SEF

Look at the example SEF extract on the next slide.

- Compare the areas evaluated in this section to the judgement factors listed in the Ofsted Inspection Handbook. (Paragraph 289: [School inspection handbook for September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/101222/school-inspection-handbook-for-september-2023.pdf)).

Is there enough detail?

Has the school included a range of evidence to support the evaluation?

What else would you include for your own school?

- Look at **Behaviour and Attitudes** in your own school SEF.

Does it reflect your school's current position?

Is robust evidence used to support the evaluation?

Are the development areas clear?



BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES - *outstanding*

Strengths

Children at XX School are **positive and enthusiastic** about their learning. *They report that the calm, orderly environment allows them to learn (Pupil Voice, May 2019)*

Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. In lessons, pupils work well together, cooperating and supporting each other when needed. Similarly, at playtime, pupils are kind, friendly and warm towards each other. They are welcoming and inclusive to everyone in the school community (Ofsted 2019).

The Parent Questionnaire (July 2019) showed that **98% of children are happy at our school**. 100% of the 216 respondents said they would recommend our school to others. Our children and staff are proud to be part of our school and there is a buzz of excitement as you walk around our school.

Pupils love learning because teachers make learning interesting and fun (Ofsted 2019).

There have been no fixed term exclusions in the last 6 years.

Behaviour is excellent. The school's **Behaviour Policy** ensures a consistent approach to behaviour management based on mutual respect and positive reinforcement across all areas of school life. All staff are consistent in their expectations for behaviour and 'The School Way'. We use **targeted support** and **adaptations** for those pupils that have additional needs to ensure all children can be successful. Circle times and PSHE sessions ensure that issues are discussed by the children on a regular basis and allow them opportunities to contribute to the practices in the school.

Instances of bullying are very low; 97% of parents reported no experiences of bullying or agree that the school deals with bullying effectively.

Pupils learn how to stay safe in a range of situations... Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe online. Pupils with whom I spoke said that bullying was rare and that when it did happen it was resolved quickly. Pupils describe the school as a 'happy place'. Parents who responded to the online survey overwhelmingly agreed that their children feel safe and are well cared for in school (Ofsted 2019).

All year groups in the school have a **planned curriculum to support keeping them safe online**. We also use local PCSOs and the Junior Citizen Programme to support good and safe online behaviour. *Pupils in KS2 say they understand the risks and know how to keep themselves safe (Pupil Voice, May 2019)*

Attendance (97.1%) is higher than the national average (96%). Persistent absenteeism (1.9%) is significantly lower than the national averages (8.2%) for all pupils and for vulnerable groups (particularly SEND and PP). We now have greater engagement with parents and more rigorous attendance tracking by the inclusion team which has resulted in good attendance of our SEND and PP groups compared to previous years.

Areas for development

- Induction of new staff so that all can contribute effectively to the school culture from day 1
- Develop support sessions for those children identified with mental health or well-being challenges
- Embed parental engagement programme to continue promoting good attendance



School improvement planning

When the school has an accurate view of its current strengths and weaknesses, the headteacher will draft a **school improvement plan** (SIP) to address the key priorities. This plan will set out the main measures that will be taken to raise standards, the resources dedicated to these, the people responsible and the key outcomes and targets it intends to achieve in the form of SMART objectives.



This plan may have a different name in your school but they are all interchangeable.

Other common names include:

School development plan (SDP)

Raising achievement plan (RAP)

The plan forms the governing board's **'road map'** for the year and should be agreed by the Board. It sets out what the board will expect the executive leaders to deliver. All appraisal within the school will be linked to this plan and the governing board's work for the year will be linked to this plan too.



School improvement plan

The SIP is considered at every full governing board meeting; it usually has its own agenda item as this work is so important for the development of the school.

The headteacher will update the board on current progress and any issues that may slow this progress. Governors are interested in **the impact on pupils**; by asking questions to identify the impact, the governing board is able to hold the school to account and to take action sooner rather than later.

Common questions are usually linked to the **key outcomes and targets** from the SIP. These challenge questions should be recorded in the governing board minutes and any evaluations and actions that result should be recorded too.

A section from an example SIP is included on the next slide.



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Example SIP Extract Behaviour and Attitudes		Person Responsible: Markus Endby Lead Governor: Gillian Bear	
Priority		Expected Outcomes	
Embed restorative approaches so that they are consistently applied by adults to support behaviour and resolve conflict.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The restorative approach is consistently embedded in practice across the school so there are fewer repeated incidents recorded. Pupil and Parent Voice show that pupils feel safe at school. 	
Target	Actions and Milestones	Resources	
	Actions with timescale	Milestones by term & monitoring	Cost and resources
To clarify and reinforce positive learning attitudes across the school.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Update behaviour policy (for Inset day 09/23) Leadership to set out expectations to all staff for our school values and effective learning behaviours (Inset day 02.09.2023) All teachers to share expectations with children and to build in daily explicit focuses on learning behaviours in action. (In place from 07/09/2023) Staff consistently share and reinforce expectations within classrooms and the wider school. (In place by 30/09.2023) 	Autumn Term (and continued for Spring and Summer) Learning Walks and Drop-ins show: The consistent application of the behaviour policy across the school. That learning behaviours are known, understood and used in all classes. That school values underpin all relationships and interactions. Pupil Voice shows that: Children at all stages can reflect on the school values and what they mean in practice.	INSET day time
To embed restorative approaches as part of the behaviour policy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Revisit restorative approach introduced in 2019 including updating the 'repair and redraw' scripts with teachers and TAs by 30/09/2023. Design a template to support pupil reflection and restorative approached by 30/10/2023) Ensure all lunchtime supervisors and afterschool club staff are trained and supported to implement the policy approaches by 31/03/2023. 	Autumn Term All staff understand the importance of restorative conversations after behaviour incidents. (<i>Appraisal conversations</i>) All staff use the agreed scripts to support the restorative process. Spring Term The majority of staff are confident using the restorative scripts. (<i>Staff survey</i>) Pupils report that they feel safe in school and find the support helpful. (<i>Pupil Voice exercise</i>)	Staff and TA Meeting Time Training / induction for new staff (£250)

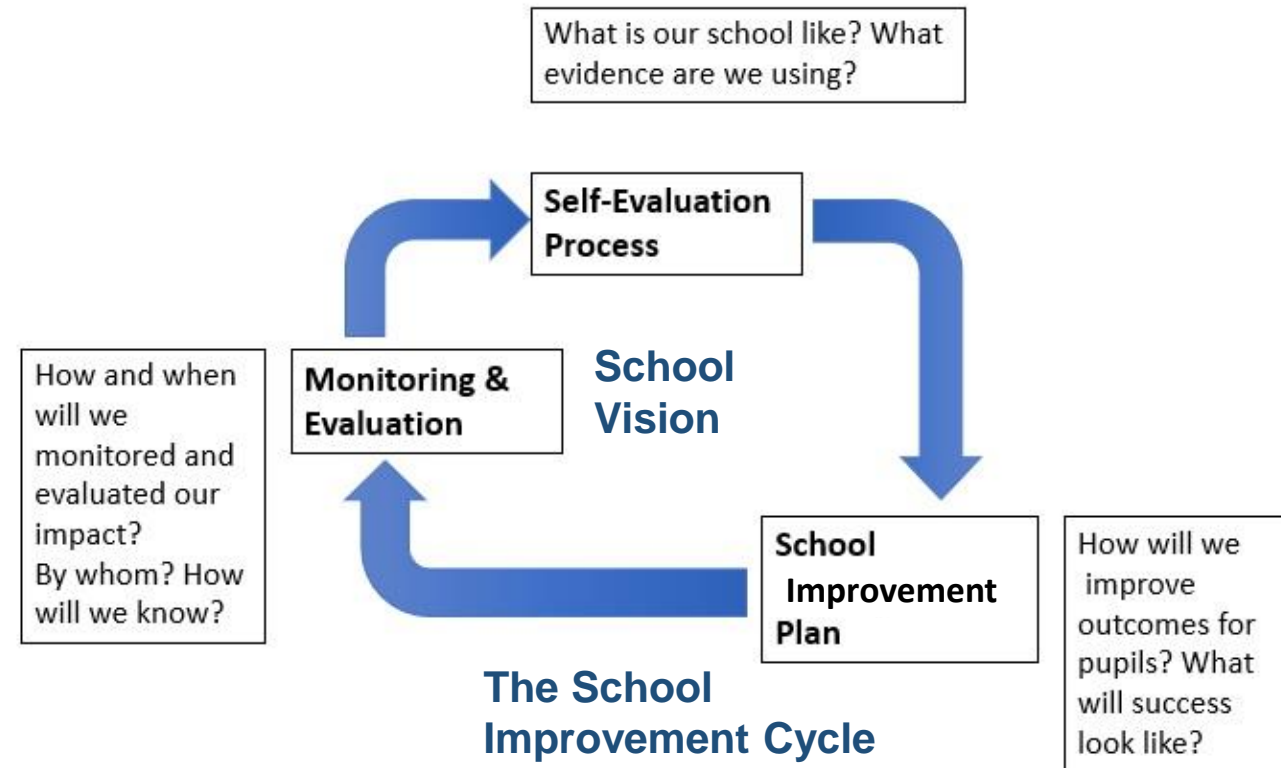


Monitoring and evaluating

The SEF and SIP set out the current situation and the agreed plan to improve. The main work of the governing board though is to **ensure the plan has the desired impact**. This happens through monitoring and evaluation.

The monitoring needs to be planned and delegated to governors so that everyone on the board understands their role in this work.

A **governor monitoring plan** will show what evidence will be collected, where it will come from and what will happen following its collection. This plan will keep the board focused on its key priorities.



Governor monitoring plan

Consider this sample from a typical governor monitoring plan.

What else would you add to make this useful for your board?

Sample from a Governors' Monitoring Schedule 20XX-20XX

Priority Area	What is being monitored?	Where is the evidence from?	Lead?	Timing and action?
The Quality of Education <i>All teaching will be good or outstanding; because of this pupil learning will improve so that 92% of pupils make good or better progress over the school year.</i>	Learning and Teaching <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are Learning Objectives used and understood in all classes? Is differentiation used in all classes and does it allow all pupils to learn? Do pupils learn across the school year through appropriately sequenced learning opportunities? Does this continue from class to class? Is progress good or better for all groups of pupils? Do pupil books/work demonstrate good or better progress in all classes? Is the quality of education good or outstanding in all areas of the school? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headteacher termly summary of Quality of Teaching and Learning to include book/work scrutiny summary with highlighting strengths and areas for improvement within the school and actions taken Governor paired learning walks - working walls; display of pupils' work; use of equipment; evidence of challenges for greater depth and SEN pupils Staff supported book scrutiny - differentiated work including evidence of challenges for greater depth; scaffolded work for lower ability; Appropriately differentiated work for SEND; record and pupil understanding of Learning Objective; work builds on previous learning and pupils can explain this Pupil and Parent Voice Notes of Visit from external consultants Termly assessment data for year, class and groups 	Performance Committee Jane Percival/ Adam Khan HT/DHT with Committee Emma Vardy HT to disseminate Performance Committee	Committee Meeting 2, 4 and 6. Key outcomes and actions to next FGB for agreement Third week of each term – shared on GovernorHub and to next FGB for action Ninth week of each term- shared on GovernorHub and to next FGB for action October and April – to committee working group then to next committee Committee meeting after they are received First week of each term and 07 July. Key findings to FGB for decision about

The governor monitoring plan lists the key **evidence** the board will use to evaluate the success of its SIP.

This evidence should come from a **range of sources** so it can be validated and linked to the success criteria from the SIP.



Governor evaluation

The monitoring plan also signposts how the monitoring evidence will be **evaluated**. This evaluation allows the governing board to check whether the SIP is having a positive impact on pupils or not, and to take action if needed.

Named governors / committees are **linked to each action**. This ensures that all governors know the role they have to play in monitoring the SIP.

The timetable for monitoring should be **agreed with the headteacher** if it involves visits to school or additional workload for the school staff.



Summary

The school improvement cycle provides a frame for the governing board as it undertakes its core improvement work.

It ensures that:

- Governors have a **shared vision** for the school
- Key **priorities and strengths** of the school are identified regularly (using a range of evidence) and shared in the agreed SEF; governors really know their school
- There is **an agreed plan** to address the key priorities and this plan informs the staff appraisal objectives and the governor monitoring
- All governors **know and understand** their role
- Changes can be made **rapidly** if the plan is not having the desired effect



The SEF and SIP ensure governors **know the current situation** in their school and have **a plan to improve** key areas; the monitoring and evaluation plans ensure the board can **assess** the situation regularly, **take action** if the plans are not effective and **maintain an accurate view** of their school throughout the cycle.



Additional support

Further information about school improvement work in your school will be available from your Chair or your governor mentor. *Please ask for copies of the SEF, SIP and monitoring plan if you have not seen these already. Check you understand your role in the process.*

Consider any other training needs you have. There may be other modules in this series that would help you in your governor role or you may benefit from joining one of our face to face training sessions. *Details of these are available from your clerk or by contacting Governor Services.*

If you have additional questions, do get in touch with Oxfordshire County Council Governor Services, who will be happy to support you:

Email: GovernorServices@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

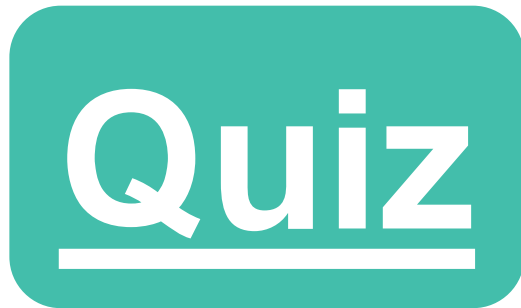
Phone: 03300 249046



Quiz and feedback

We hope you have found this introduction to the **School Improvement Cycle** helpful.

Please use the link below to access the quiz and feedback.



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Thank you for completing this training and for your valuable feedback.

