

# Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction

Part of the Governor Services *Introduction to Governance* Series

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# The role of governors

Governing boards have three important core functions. These are explained at the start of the Department for Education (DfE) **Governance Handbook** which can be accessed here:

Governance  
Handbook

The first core function of any governing board is to **ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction** for the school or trust.

Most governing boards are composed of volunteers from a wide variety of backgrounds and with different reasons for taking on the role.

**Clarity** of the overall aims of the board will be essential if all governors are to work effectively for the good of the school.



# Strategic direction

The Governance Handbook says that governors clarify the **strategic direction**.

## What does this actually mean for governors and schools?

Strategic direction describes the way the school will develop and change in the longer term. For example, this could include creating an engaging and exciting curriculum; building a culture of strong parental engagement or providing robust leadership throughout the school.

The improvement of schools is one of the board's main responsibilities and the strategic direction should be reflected in all aspects of the board's work, whether written, spoken or actioned.

Primarily, the strategic direction encompasses:

- the agreed school **vision**
- the identified **priorities** for the school
- any community or **stakeholder involvement**
- the **strategic plan** to achieve improvement.

More information about priorities and the strategic plan is available in the **School Improvement Cycle** module from this series.

# Supporting the strategic direction

## When

- the agreed school vision
- the identified priorities for the school
- any community or stakeholder involvement
- the strategic plan to achieve improvement

are understood by the board; are relevant and personal to the school; link together cohesively and are communicated effectively, the whole school community can understand and support the strategic direction.

## Are you aware of your school's strategic direction?

- Is the strategic direction understood by all governors?
- Is it shared with your school community?



# Developing a vision

Schools develop a **vision statement** to guide their overarching strategy. This will involve considering the mission of your school: what is your school's purpose today?

An inspiring, shared vision is central to the school's ongoing improvement and should be used regularly to inform strategic decisions and to ensure the school is moving towards its vision.

The school vision represents **the future** that you wish to create.

When your agreed aspirations are set out clearly and are communicated widely, they become a powerful tool for engagement. All governors and school leaders will work towards this vision at a strategic level and staff, parents, pupils and the local community will be able to contribute to, understand and support the school's aims.



# The process to develop a vision

When was your vision last **reviewed or renewed**?  
Who was involved in this process?

Working with your **headteacher and senior leaders**, the board should prioritise time to review and consider the school vision. This is usually undertaken every two or three years but may be more often if the school has had a significant change, such as a change of headteacher or a large turnover of governors.

The review process might be a stand alone session, a group of 'discussion and action' meetings or an away day. Whatever your school choices, the process usually takes about half a day.

The vision will be most relevant when it **includes the views of stakeholders** such as staff, pupils and parents or carers. This increases the chance that the vision will be reflective of the whole school community and that the community will understand and support the vision. This collection of views can be carried out beforehand (perhaps through feedback forms or face to face meetings) to inform leaders' discussions and decisions.



# Decide what you want to achieve

## 1. Where are we now with our vision?

Does it reflect our school? Does everyone understand and support it? Is it out of date or uninspiring?

## 2. What are we aiming to achieve?

Do we want to review and update the current version or create a whole new vision? Is the purpose to discuss and share the vision with new leaders? Or to raise the profile of the vision across the school community?

## 3. What changes do we want to encourage?

Do we want everyone to be able to communicate the vision clearly, or to know how to put it into practice through their role? Do you want to empower leaders or enthuse parents to support the vision? Perhaps we want to create new enthusiasm for the school's purpose?





# External facilitator or not?

It can be helpful to have an external facilitator to run the vision session. This can allow all governors and school leaders to focus on the discussions and contribute to the session but it isn't essential. This will be a decision for individual boards.

A **basic agenda** for the session might include:

- Welcome and introduction
- Clarification of the aims of the session (link to the questions on slide 7)
- Session 1 (and possibly 2) used to generate ideas. This is usually through questions linked to what we would like pupils to say about the school in years to come.
- Session 3 used to refine or rewrite the vision
- Closing reiteration of the new or refreshed vision statement and how it will be shared with others in the school community
- Goodbyes





# Effective vision statements

## Our School Vision



- We are an outstanding school with curious children.
- All of our children are helpful, brave and well-rounded.
- We inspire and empower a generation of life-long learners.
- We have children who are enthusiastic about all of life's opportunities.



Consider this **vision statement**.  
**Do you think it is effective?**  
Why? Jot down your reasons.



# What makes a good vision?

## A good vision:

- Reflects the school's community and its challenges
- Is grounded in the ethos, values and culture of the school
- It clear about what will be different
- Motivates and engages
- Is clear and concise
- Is realistic
- Can be measured

Effective vision statements are the **culmination of a process** involving different parts of the school community. While the vision is agreed by the governing board, it is the process that helps to cement and share the values and aspirations with the whole community.



**Look back at the vision statement on the previous slide and your notes.** Has your view changed?

What simple changes would make this more effective?

- Does this reflect the school community at all?
- Is it looking to the future?

**Now look at your own school vision statement.**

Does it reflect the aspirations of your school?

# Values

School values are chosen to support the agreed vision for the school.

The values set out the **behaviours and key standards** that everyone in the school community will follow whether they are children, parents, staff, visitors or governors.

These values may be **specific characteristics** (such as kindness or courage) or **wider principles** (such as inclusion, equality or diversity).

The values should be directly and indirectly taught in the school and should inform school decision making processes, communications and interactions.

**Think about your school values.**

Why were they chosen?  
How are they shared?



# Ethos

The first core function for governing boards is to: *clarify vision, ethos and strategic direction.*

The ethos of a school can be hard to define. Often it is described in terms of the **character, spirit** or **climate** of a school.

It may also be thought of as the part of the school that **informs the beliefs, practices and customs of the school.**

In essence, the ethos of a school is everything you see, feel and hear about the school that forms your opinion of it. The ethos should reflect the school's values.

## Consider your school ethos.

What ideas, attitudes and characteristics are communicated about your school? Think about the presentation of the classrooms, any communications you have seen recently and any interactions you have had with staff. Do these reflect the agreed values?



# Ethos and culture

The ethos of the school will influence the way groups of people within the school community **behave**.

If your ethos is positive and is linked to your shared values, behaviours within the school community should reflect this. This may be shown in excellent pupil behaviour, a supportive parent body or staff who seek additional responsibilities. This behaviour is the **culture** of the school.

If the vision, values and ethos of a school are unclear and not communicated effectively, the culture can be hard to change.

**Is the ethos at your school positively affecting the culture?**

Are there aspects that need to be improved in the school to improve the ethos?



# What happens next?

When the board knows the mission of the school, has agreed a robust and relevant vision and has clarified the school values and ethos, there should be a clear understanding of the strategic direction of the school.

To ensure the vision is realised, the board will need to look at the current situation of the school (through a self-evaluation process), identify the key priorities and agree a plan to move the school forward in the short term.

There is more information about this part of the board's work in the **School Improvement Cycle** module in this series.





# Summary

The board has a core function to clarify the **vision, ethos and strategic direction** of the school.

To do this the board needs to decide on the purpose (or mission) of the school; determine the vision of the school for the future; agree values that will allow the vision to be achieved and ensure the values are alive in the ethos (or atmosphere and attitudes) of the school.

All parts of this process will involve consultation and effective, ongoing communication with staff, parents, children and the wider school community.

This work will inform the School Improvement Cycle of the school.





# Additional support

Further information about the **vision, values and ethos** of your school will be available from your Chair or your governor mentor. *Please ask for information about the processes used to determine or evaluate these if you have not had this information already.*

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](mailto:GovernorServices@Oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Phone: 03300 249046



# Quiz and Feedback

We hope you have found this introduction to **Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction** helpful.

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

[Quiz](#)

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

