

GOVERNANCE⁴FE

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

SOUTHPORT EDUCATION GROUP

26TH APRIL 2024



OVERVIEW

Board Review: art or science? Qualitative or quantitative? Compliance approval or forward looking? The reality is that Board Reviews are evolving rapidly. It's all the above and today there is no standard experience common across all boardrooms, though they are increasingly focused on:

- (i) deriving meaningful insights on key issues and
- (ii) using the recommendations and findings to align the Board and Executive and increase effectiveness

Every Board – however experienced - can increase its effectiveness and this review, through collaborative diagnosis between the reviewer, governors, and management, has sought to identify areas of effectiveness that can be built upon to deliver a greater maturity of governance. The follow up presentation and discussion with the Board is a key component to increasing effectiveness, as is our on-going support, guidance, and being a sounding board, during the months following the Review.

Of course, the Governance Review should provide comfort that the Board is alert to its duties and diligent in the performance of those duties. This is critically important for stakeholders, in particular our funders and regulators. In addition, the Review has considered how the Board is helping the organisation to achieve its purpose. At Governance4FE, we are very pleased to be tailoring our Board Review to shine a light on this key question and provide recommendations and a pathway as to how the Board can increase its effectiveness and value contribution.

Framework

The GREAT framework is developed on an evidence base gained over three decades of working with multiple boards, alongside academic study. We work in accordance with the DfE's current guidance on External Governance Reviews and the Chartered Governance Institute's Code of Practice for board reviewers.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMARY OF REVIEW OUTCOMES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Within the overall review of governance effectiveness, this is a positive report showing a well-developed level of governance maturity at Southport Education Group, demonstrating the good progress that has been made on governance in recent times. This summary of review outcomes should be read in conjunction with the full report as the report contains important contextual information, rationale, and evidence for all the recommendations made. The review considered the Board's effectiveness and governance maturity across the 5 main areas.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES

Strengths lie in the clear delineation of roles and efficient committee functionality and characterised by exemplary reports from committee chairs to the Board. The Board is well-informed, allowing for effective management oversight and financial control assurance. The governance professional's contribution to this is commendable. Potential development areas include enhancing assurance in committee reporting and improving governors' understanding of their role in engaging with external stakeholders; implementing a board portal for efficient document access and collaboration; and refining board reporting with strategic implications to foster forward-looking discussions and streamline governance processes.

RELATIONSHIPS

The college benefits from active governor participation; comprehensive governor development which is embedded in the Board calendar; effective board-executive relationships; and inclusion of the student voices in decision-making. Governors' external activities, like SAR validation meetings and link visits, demonstrate commitment to improvement, while an excellent induction process supports new members. Governors would like more direct interactions with students to better incorporate the student voice into governance processes. Additionally, increasing social interactions among governors and executives can build trust and confidence in support effective decision-making.

ENABLING

The college exhibits strengths in effective board operations, with members utilising multiple sources like site visits, benchmarking, and stakeholder feedback for informed oversight. Constructive challenges to the Executive's assumptions are encouraged and are met with positive responses. Decision-making is collaborative, considering various options and scenarios, facilitated by excellent chairing. The primary area for development identified is the incorporation of executive feedback into governance self-assessments, enhancing the understanding of the Board's value add to the Executive and therefore, the overall performance of the college.

ALIGNMENT

Governors play an active role in defining the college's vision, values, ethos, and oversight of its culture. They have a clear understanding of strategic objectives, thanks to strategic planning sessions and comprehensive CEO reports. Each report is linked to a strategic objective, a practice recommended for expansion to include strategic implications. The Board and committees are proactive in reviewing risk, understanding significant potential impacts and opportunities.

TEAM

Governors understand their contribution in the context of the strategic objectives. A formal CEO and senior team succession plan is advised. The Board actively pursues demographic and cognitive diversity, regularly reviewing recruitment practices and policies to enhance diversity, and overall governor performance is supported by comprehensive governance evaluations.