

APPRAISAL AND CAPABILITY

This is a précis of a recent article in Governing Matters, the magazine of the National Governors Association

Association of Greenwich Governors' Newsletter

Voice

Spring-Summer 2012

The new procedures for teachers' appraisal and capability were launched in January, to come into effect on 1 September 2012. Look at <http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=appraisal> and then click on 'new arrangements for teacher appraisal and capability'. The DfE gives a model policy, but schools do not have to adopt it.

APPRAISAL: Governing bodies must adopt a policy, and it must cover a 12-month period. Teachers must be judged against standards and objectives, there must still be an external advisor to assist with the Head's appraisal, and at the end of the year, and there must be a written appraisal for each teacher. The modal policy emphasises that appraisal should be a supportive process.

One of the most controversial aspects is the lack of a limit on classroom observation. The 2006 regulations specify that only three hours of classroom observation can be undertaken for the purposes of performance management. The model policy says 'the amount and type of classroom observation will depend on the individual circumstances of the teacher and the overall needs of the school'. It is possible that the unions will seek to negotiate a local policy that stipulates a time limit on classroom observations. The secretary of state has made very clear that he does not think there should be a limit, and the National Governors Association (NGA) agrees that an arbitrary limit is unduly restrictive.

The new regulations do not require governing bodies to consult with unions or staff, merely that teachers be informed of the model policy. The DfE documents states that it is a good idea to consult staff, and the NGA strongly recommends that governing bodies do so.

CAPABILITY: The DfE has conflated appraisal and capability into parts A and B of the model policy. This is not helpful. Good performance management involves an honest conversation between reviewer and reviewee, and if teachers believe that admitting that something did not go well will push them toward capability, then the 'honest conversation' will not happen. There are no formal regulations governing what capability procedures must look like, although local authority maintained schools must have regard to the model policy. It is perfectly acceptable to school to have two separate policies: performance management, and capability.

The most significant change in the new regulations is the recommended period of time allowed for a teacher to improve. The old regulations recommended that teachers should be given up to 20 weeks to demonstrate improvement. The new guidance recommends 10 weeks, although schools are allowed to put their own limits in place, providing these are not 'excessively long'. If teachers have demonstrated an ability to improve, the review period can be extended. The question has to be asked whether it is unreasonable to expect an individual to demonstrate improvement within 10 weeks – given that capability procedures should be put into place only once support under ordinary performance management has failed to drive improved performance. It should also be noted that the model policy is based on ACAS guidelines (an authority on employment procedures)

Of course, for both aspects of the policy, governing bodies have a responsibility to ensure not only that their policies are fair, but also that they are fairly implemented.

SOFTWARE FROM ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

Essex County Council provides, on subscription, several kinds of software that schools and governing bodies might find useful. Their tracking software, provides 'clear outcomes for individuals or groups of pupils using teacher assessment, test results and targets effectively'. Governing bodies might find data from such systems for understanding and challenging. Several secondary schools already use similar systems.

In addition, it provides a Governor Self Evaluation Tracker, to 'support schools evaluation and development of the governing body'.

I do not have personal knowledge of any of this software, but they were mentioned at a training session I attended, so I thought I should pass the information on. More information can be found at <http://www.targettracker.org/about/>

Margery Nzerem
Vice Chair, AGG



"I'll answer that in a minute. But first let me take this call from my Mum."

SCHOOLS FINANCIAL VALUES STANDARD (or - SFVS replaces FMSIS!)

The DfE has replaced the previous system of assessing schools' financial management with a new one that is said to be simpler – Schools Financial Values Standard. It is a requirement for all LA maintained schools, and other schools are welcome to use the materials provided. Maintained schools which had not attained FMSIS by the end of March 2010 must have completed and submitted the SFVS by 31 March 2012; other schools have until 31 March 2013. In either case, there must be an annual review thereafter.

Lots of information about SFVS can be found on the DfE website at <http://www.education.gov.uk/search/results?q=SFVS>. However, there is some information I was given at a training session that I thought would be useful.

The standard consists of 23 questions that governing bodies must discuss with their Head and answer Yes, No, or In Part. There is a comments column which governors can use to indicate the evidence on which it based its answer. There is no requirement that the evidence be kept, but it is a good idea to do so, as it will be needed by the Financial Auditor when they visit.

At <http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/adminandfinance/financialmanagement/b0069984/vfm/governance> you can access a 'governing body value for money health check tool'. This tool enables a school to review the role of governors in the school against best practice and it may help identify areas for improvement.

We were given several suggestions for benchmarking. At <http://www.education.gov.uk/areas-and-establishments>, it is easy to get information about local schools of your choice, so you can make sure you are benchmarking against local school. And you might want to benchmark your school against itself over the previous five years.

The TES provides two services schools might be interested in. In association with the National Association of Headteachers and the National Association of School Business Managers, it provides Buywire: 'We get you competitive quotes for a range of products and services'. Find it at <http://www.tesbuywire.com/>. It also offers HireWire, a free service which 'streamlines the entire recruitment process, driving cost and resource efficiencies whilst supporting the search to find the best candidates'. It can be found at https://www.hirewire.co.uk/AppTrackSys/ATS_Schools.aspx

Margery Nzerem
Vice Chair, AGG



As the new teacher's pet, I need to bring her a latte, not an apple!

WANT TO SAVE MONEY?



We are all interested in schools' saving money on procurement and back office spending. As Chair of the Schools Forum, the DfE has asked me to make sure your school knows about the support and information available to help you get the best possible deals.

Want access to better ICT deals?

[ICT Services Framework](#)

[ICT Consultancy Services Framework](#)

[Microsoft Licensing \(MoU\)](#)

[Software for Educational Institutions Framework](#)

If you have any questions about these ICT frameworks contact

schools.ictsupport@education.gsi.gov.uk

Need help recruiting temporary staff?

[MSTAR \(Managed Services for Temporary Agency Resources\)](#) is a national framework for the provision of a wide range of support staff including supply teachers and classroom assistants. Contact mstar.project@education.gsi.gov.uk

Printers & photocopiers – how to avoid costly contracts and leasing pitfalls

[MFDs – Multi-Functional Devices including Printers and Photocopiers](#) – the DfE is currently working on a new framework for better value deals. Contact lisa.wray@education.gsi.gov.uk

Want to brush up your skills and improve efficiency at your school?

[Buyways](#) is a free, online, interactive e-learning course – an entry-level introduction to good procurement principles. Contact Buyways.ENQUIRIES@education.gsi.gov.uk

[Efficiency in Schools](#) – one-stop-shop with information and online tools designed to help schools use resources in the best way possible. Contact vfm.resources@education.gsi.gov.uk

Visit the [Schools Financial Benchmarking](#) website and the [2011 Performance Tables](#) to compare your school's spending and attainment with other schools

www.education.gov.uk/procurement

www.education.gov.uk/efficiency

www.education.gov.uk/sfb

www.education.gov.uk/financialmanagement

Roy Moore

Chair, Schools Forum

BEWARE AND VERY VERY WARY OF 'TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE' LEASING DEALS

The school highlighted here, Glemsford Primary School, now not only owes £500,000, but the Local Authority has replaced the governing body with an IEB and the head has been removed from the school.

Schools across the UK are being charged up to 10 times too much for laptops and other IT equipment through mis-sold lease agreements, a BBC Radio 5 live investigation has found. In some cases, head teachers are being chased for payment by finance companies for equipment they were told was free. An industry insider says the overcharging could run to hundreds of millions of pounds.

The Department for Education says there is lots of advice available for heads. But the Leasing Advisory Service, a claims management company that represents victims of mis-sold leases says it has identified a particular problem with schools leasing computer equipment. Under these schemes, schools effectively hire equipment from a supplier by taking on a loan from a bank that funds the supplier.

One of the schools affected is Glemsford Primary in Suffolk, which received a visit from a company called Direct Technology Solutions Ltd, which offered to take on the contract for supplying the school's photocopiers. James Loker-Steele, who is in charge of the school's IT, told [5 live Investigates](#): "They came to us and said we were going to be a flagship school so we'd get priority on various pieces of kit that came up or any promotions. Glemsford Primary School was initially told the laptops they were given were free of charge "Their sales person phoned us up and said: 'We've managed to source about 1,000 laptops, would you like any?'"

When the school explained it could not afford the equipment, they were told it would not be a problem as the equipment would be free and part of a promotion, Mr Loker-Steele said. So Glemsford Primary School agreed to take on 100 computers on the basis that it would not cost anything. The school says they were told they had to sign an agreement to satisfy EU regulations, but were assured that DTS Ltd would cover the cost of the equipment.

In fact, they had unwittingly signed long-term leases on the laptops. This meant they were effectively hiring the equipment from a finance company. Initially, this caused them no difficulties because the first few payments on the lease were covered by Direct Technology Solutions Ltd. But then the company went administration, leaving Glemsford Primary exposed to thousands of pounds worth of liabilities owed to the bank, which they could not afford. The school owes an estimated £500,000 to Clydesdale Bank after leasing equipment with a value of approximately £700,000.

Schools need to be absolutely sure of what they sign up to and read the small print because it is usually very difficult to legally challenge or break these type of contracts" An accountancy firm which is investigating the non-payment of leases by schools on behalf of one of the banks which financed the agreements says Glemsford Primary is just one of dozens of victims. And not only are they facing huge and unexpected costs but they have also been significantly overcharged.

The accountancy firm said Direct Technology Solutions Ltd had marked up the cost of the equipment it supplied by up to 10 times what the assets are actually worth. "For example, a laptop that has a price of between £350 and £400 is charged at £3,750," one accountant said, adding: "Some schools were having 100-200 laptops delivered at this price."

Many other schools have knowingly signed up to lease agreements for photocopiers and other equipment but have still been significantly overcharged by their suppliers. Martin Tucker, a consultant with the Leasing Advisory Service, says they have identified a particular problem with schools. "From what we've found we are barely scratching the surface," he told 5 live.

The Leasing Advisory Service says it is helping one local authority, which had to pay nearly £500,000 to settle a lease on behalf of one school for photocopiers worth just £45,000. "A lot of the suppliers either don't exist now or they have phoenixed and evolved into different companies so they might not be around to make a claim against them so you have to go for the finance companies," he explains. "And the finance companies' stance is basically it's nothing to do with us," says Mr Tucker.

The Finance and Leasing Association, which represents the banks and other companies financing leases for schools, urged schools to be wary of signing agreements, which sound too good to be true. It has recently issued new guidance on leasing in schools and said it would be monitoring developments.

A Department for Education spokesman said: "Schools need to be absolutely sure of what they sign up to and read the small print because it is usually very difficult to legally challenge or break these types of contracts. "These issues tend to be a combination of very poor decision making from schools and opportunistic/predatory sales tactics from suppliers - so schools need to be clued up. "We always help schools as best we can who may be locked into poor deals but many are reluctant to come forward for help." It added that the department was happy to support individual heads concerned about their existing or potential leasing agreements.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GOVERNOR VISITS POLICY

Governors have always been welcomed at our school and many governors were in the habit of making regular visits to the school. These visits had varied considerably in style. At one extreme a visit might have a very tight focus, for example when a literacy governor looked at literacy with the literacy coordinator. At the other extreme a visit might be very general, with a small party of governors visiting every classroom in the school, each for a short length of time, in an attempt to get a general feeling for the school.

For a number of reasons we felt the need to review our practice.

The first reason was that, when we began auditing our governing body ready to apply for Governormark, we identified the need to monitor the school more effectively. We realised that our practice was rather uncoordinated and that we had no framework for setting monitoring priorities.

The second reason was that, for the school, hosting a lot of individual governor visits was demanding of staff time. It resulted in staff spending quite a lot of time showing individual governors round, often duplicating discussions, whilst at the same time not always being able to have key people free to talk to visiting governors in appropriate depth.

The third reason was that we realised that the governing body was not being involved in the induction of new governors. Helping new governors to learn what they should do on a school visit was being left mainly to the training provided by Governor Services and to members of staff on new governors' first visits. Several governors knew of cases where new parent governors had misunderstood their role and had, usually unwittingly, behaved inappropriately causing real difficulties for the relationship between the school and governors.

During the early stages of development I, as Chair of Governors, had many informal discussions with other governors, the head and staff about how we could move forward. It was clear that we needed to try to meet each of the points above. Eventually these discussions resulted in the suggestion that every school year we should identify a half-day in each term for a group visit by as many governors as could make themselves available. Each visit would preferably be a few days before the term's governing body meeting. The intention was that the three foci for the visits would be agreed at the last governing body meeting of the previous year. The format of each visit was to be that the topic would be introduced to governors by a senior member of staff, that the governors would then go to observe related activities, possibly in several subgroups, and that the governors would then come back together with staff for a discussion.

Once the principle had been agreed we produced a draft policy. As well as outlining the procedures above we also included a discussion of the role of governors and a restriction that normally no governor would visit a class which included their child, the child of a relative or the child of a close friend. This was to try to emphasise that the visit was a monitoring visit on behalf of the whole governing body rather than an opportunity to see known children in school.

The draft policy was first shared with the Head who, after some thought and discussion with senior colleagues, agreed it with a few minor modifications.

The draft was then presented to the Curriculum Committee where it provoked a great deal of helpful discussion. A revised draft was circulated to the whole governing body by email for further comment before eventually being adopted by the whole governing body.

We feel that the visits have been very helpful to our governing body in helping us to monitor the school. To show the range of our monitoring visits, last year our first visit was to look at the reading policy, our second looked at the teaching of PE and our final visit looked at the foundation stage with a particular emphasis on ICT.

In each case the coordinator first gave us an overview of the theory and practice in the school and, where appropriate, related it to other aspects of the school such as progress records. Next we made visits to classes, sometimes splitting up into pairs, sometimes into larger groups. In each case an attempt was made to pair up inexperienced governors with experienced ones. Finally we came back and shared our experiences with each other and the coordinator and were able to ask questions and discuss what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses in the school and how the school proposed to take things forward.

Governors have built up a much more in depth understanding in the areas chosen and feel more confident that they are truly monitoring the school. The annual discussion where the foci for the visits are chosen is particularly helpful in giving the governing body the chance to stand back and look at priorities for the next year. The feedback we have had from the school is that staff, and the coordinators in particular, have found organising these visits a challenge but have benefitted from them professionally. We all feel that our style of visits contributed to our governing body being graded outstanding along with the school when we were inspected by Ofsted about 18 months ago. The only sadness is that it is still not possible for all members of the governing body to be free to take part in daytime visits but those who can are much better informed.

If you are interested in seeing a copy of our policy the Clerk to your Governing body will, I am sure, be able to provide you with one.

Geoff Sheath
Chair, Middle Park Governors

Quote: Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.
~ Henry Ford