

Governor Mark Assessor Newsletter



governance, leadership and management

...achieving excellence in schools

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Maintaining the Standards

This section of our newsletter is normally devoted (and quite rightly too) to celebrating governing bodies who have shown themselves to be highly effective, who show they have a positive impact on the quality of their school, and who therefore have been awarded *Governor Mark*.

Not every governing body achieves the award, however, and with *Governor Mark* hopefully opening up to all schools, not just good and outstanding schools, (we are calling this 'Routeway Two') we may see more applications from schools who don't achieve the standard. It is important that schools recognise that this is not a soft award where everyone gets a prize. It is important that they also realise what they need to do to become a 'Governor Mark' governing body, and we are working hard to make our guidance as clear as possible.

Governor Mark is more than a self-evaluation tool. In self-evaluation governors can come to a view of their strengths and weaknesses; but a further dimension is added when an external assessor arrives and checks out whether they agree with the view of the governing body. In this way *Governor Mark* is highly developmental.

Three more Governor mark Schools

Congratulations to the following governing bodies who have recently been awarded *Governor Mark*:

Heritage Park Primary School, Peterborough;

Sharnbrook John Gifford Lower School, Bedfordshire;

Lingey House Primary School, Gateshead.

Overall we have currently received 13 firm applications. Seven have achieved the mark, one has not, and the other five are in the assessment process.

Do we seek perfection?

No Governing body is perfect. We all know that. Nevertheless it is possible that one reason for the gap between the number of schools engaging with the standards, and those actually applying, is the feeling that nothing less than perfect will do.

Most evidence grids come to us with every box ticked at least 'fully compliant'. Ducks are all perfectly in a row. One problem that often emerges, however is that this effort to look perfect can mask the very thing that **must** be evident - governing body engagement with school improvement.

In recent correspondence with a school preparing impact statements we advised the chair that there was too much

about governing body processes, not enough about impact. In her reply she said 'I will wash a bit more of our dirty linen in public...' This is exactly right - good governance is about the board asking themselves 'How can we improve learning?'

It may also be a temptation on the part of the assessor to penalise governing bodies for omissions in processes or policies etc. We all have our personal preferences, but the *Governor Mark* is 'non-prescriptive' meaning that a governing body may not have the committees or the methods I would prefer, but are they good enough?

If they are really engaged in school improvement, they are likely to be.

Routeway Two

Routeway One is the current arrangement. To qualify for *Routeway One* the governing body must have evidence that either the school was graded *good* or *outstanding* by the last Ofsted inspection or, (if it is more than two years since the last inspection), the school CVA data (Contextual Value Added found in the RAISEonline report) reaches the national mean of 100 minus the confidence limit (1000 in secondary schools).

Currently the cost of a *Routeway One* assessment is £495

We are moving forwards in opening up *Governor Mark* to all schools, not just good or outstanding schools. This would be known as **Routeway Two**. Where a school is graded *satisfactory* or *inadequate* by Ofsted this does not automatically mean that governance is weak. Because there is a need for a more developmental approach to using the *Mark*, *Routeway Two* involves a commitment to two assessment visits.

The first will be an assessment following a normal application in the same way as *Routeway One*. One outcome from the assessment will be to identify aspects of governing body impact that need to be strengthened. There may be aspects of the application (e.g. one of the impact statements) that will need to be re-submitted. A subsequent assessment will take place some months later following which *Governor Mark* can be awarded.

It is possible that a school following *Routeway Two* can achieve *Governor Mark* on the basis of the first visit, and they may not need to incur the expense of the second.

The cost of *Routeway Two* assessment is likely to be in the region of £895, and we have met with the DCSF to gain their support for it. This meeting was very encouraging although we await their written response.

There is clearly an opportunity for development work to take place between assessment visits, and a local governor trainer (not the assessor covering the *Governor Mark* assessment) can deliver the necessary support.

Common issues in applications

Very few applications arrive complete. We recognise that one reason for this may be that the guidance is not very clear, and this is something we are seeking to improve in the review.

In order to be clear, these are the documents we need to go forward with an assessment:

- Evidence grid
- Impact statements
- Contact details
- RAISEonline (or equivalent)
- SEF
- Ofsted report

It is important that these documents come electronically. By that, we prefer an actual electronic version, rather than a handwritten form scanned into the computer! We need them all in order to process the application. Often we find ourselves chasing up impact statements or RAISEonline reports, and this delays things.

It also helps if other evidence is forwarded electronically as well, when the assessor requests it from the school, even if it takes a few separate emails to avoid too vast a file in one attachment.

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