

BFG Guidance Notes for School Governors

Policies - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The whole area of policies – which ones you need to have, how frequently to review them, etc can seem like a minefield!

It is true to say that policies provide an important framework for the management of the school, however it is also true that governors tend to spend far too much of their time dealing with them.

Here are some frequently asked questions which may answer some of your queries.

<p>Why do we have policies?</p> <p>It makes sense to have an agreed approach to an issue, and done well a set of policies provides the framework in which a school can operate effectively with due regard to fairness and equality of opportunity.</p> <p>A number of policies are required by law. (see next question)</p>
<p>Which statutory policies do we need?</p> <p>The DfE has produced a list of policies required by education and governance regulations.</p> <p>This is found at: http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/cuttingburdens/a00201669/statutory-policies-for-schools</p> <p>This list also includes other documents that schools must have by law.</p> <p>Although the list includes policies you must have it doesn't include all the policies you may need so it is not a complete checklist.</p>
<p>We need a new policy. Where can we get a model policy to use as a guide?</p> <p>An excellent resource book is available called 'Policies: A Guide for School Governors and Headteachers'. This comes with a range of sample policies and includes a CD with the policies to enable you to use them. This publication can be purchased from Adamson Publishing Ltd. www.adamsonbooks.com</p> <p>The Local Authority provides some model policies on the school management website. http://schools.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/ HR policies are on the HR tab.</p>

<p>Why doesn't the Council provide us with model policies for all the ones we need to have?</p> <p>The LA does provide model policies for schools to adopt where appropriate eg teachers pay and school complaints. However 'off the peg' policies that can be rubber stamped and filed away are not ideal because the governing body must take ownership of what the policies say and understand the implications of implementing them.</p> <p>The discussion involved in the development of a policy is valuable and can bring up other factors that need to be addressed and included. Each school is individual and it is important to tailor policies to your school.</p>
<p>How often do we need to review policies?</p> <p>There are few hard and fast rules on how frequently policies should be reviewed, but best practice would be every one to three years unless otherwise dictated by the DfE or by changes in legislation.</p> <p>The list at http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/toolsandinitiatives/cuttingburdens/a00201669/statutory-policies-for-schools provides guidance on review for some policies.</p>
<p>Who should review policies?</p> <p>It is not the job of the governing body to write policies, but it is the governing body's role to provide strategic direction, ensure that they are in place and that they are working.</p> <p>Usually the job of monitoring and reviewing a policy would fall to a committee, and this should be reflected in the committee's terms of reference. The committee should report and recommend approval to the full governing body.</p> <p>Some policies such as School Behaviour are the responsibility of the Headteacher</p> <p>Policies on individual subjects in the curriculum are developed and reviewed by the Headteacher and staff.</p>
<p>Does the full governing body have to approve all policies?</p> <p>No. The DfE list provides guidance on approval authority for statutory policies. The authority for many policies can be delegated to a committee or an individual eg the Headteacher. The full governing body is however required to approve the SEN policy.</p> <p>The approval authority for the School Behaviour policy is the Headteacher. The governing body is however responsible for agreeing a written statement of behaviour principles for the headteacher to use in developing the policy.</p> <p>Policies concerned with specific areas of the curriculum, would normally be dealt with by the appropriate committee.</p> <p>AVOID discussing policies twice eg at committee and at full GB meetings. It is a waste of valuable time.</p>

How do we go about reviewing policies?

Review should be focussed on the impact of the policy. Is it working? What is the evidence? What are the outcomes for children? Do we need this policy?

Is it up to date in terms of current legislation? When reading about developments in education eg in Clerks' briefing papers or other sources, be mindful of the possible impact on the currency of school policies. You don't have to wait until a policy reaches its review date to update it.

Is it being implemented properly and are the people (eg staff / parents) who need to know aware of it? Should it be on the school website?

Review does not always mean change. Many policies work well and do not need amending. However remember to change the date on the policy so that people know it has been reviewed.

The list of policies always seems to get longer and longer. Can we ever dispense with policies?

Questioning the need for a policy should form part of the review process. In some cases it may be possible to combine policies.

When there is a new requirement or recommendation for a policy always consider whether it can be incorporated into an existing policy?

It's difficult keeping track of which policies need reviewing and when! Any suggestions?

Keep a simple spreadsheet or table of policies with columns for:

- Status (statutory / recommended etc)
- The approval authority (Committee, FGB, Headteacher)
- When it was agreed or last reviewed
- Date of review
- Review interval

This can then be sorted according to date or responsibility depending on how you want to use it.

The list is itself evidence for auditors / inspectors that there is a review process in operation.

Do all policies have to be in the same format?

The short answer is no but a consistent format will make them more accessible to everyone. This does not have to be done all at one time, but perhaps as each is reviewed.