

Question and challenge and courageous conversations

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The independent organisation
for school governors, trustees
and clerks



Welcome and introductions



NGA is a membership organisation

- NGA is an independent charity representing and supporting governors and trustees in maintained schools and academies in England
- Our aim is to improve the effectiveness of governing boards by providing expert and tailored information, guidance and advice, and challenge when appropriate

n|g|a **GOLDline**
The NGA Advice Service

n|g|a National
Governance
Association

GUIDANCE CENTRE

Governing board membership

- **STANDARD** governing board £85
- **GOLD** governing board £260

www.nga.org.uk/join



The purpose of the session

At the end of this session you will have examined your board's approach to this aspect of your governance role, and will have looked at a range of approaches for ensuring that you find the answers you need and are confident in following up with a courageous conversation when necessary.

We will do this by exploring:

1. Board competencies
2. Types of question
3. Possible scenarios
4. When to escalate an issue
5. When to follow up and how

1. Board competencies



Effective governance – the eight elements

1. The right people round the table
2. Understanding the role and responsibilities
3. Professional clerking
4. Good chairing
5. Good relationships based on trust
6. Knowing the organisation – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community
7. **Committed to asking challenging questions**
8. **Confident to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people**

The DfE's Competency framework

Principles and personal attributes

Confident Of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express their opinion and to play an active role on the board.

Curious Possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach and understanding the value of meaningful questioning.

Challenging Providing appropriate challenge to the status quo, not taking information or data at face value and always driving for improvement.



The Governance handbook



“Crucially, that means creating robust accountability for executive leaders by using and being familiar with objective data on the performance of pupils, teachers and finances to **ask the right questions**.

I want everyone involved in governance to be **confident in tackling underperformance, challenging mediocrity**, and setting the highest of expectations; refusing to accept second best for any child.”

Lord Nash, former Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

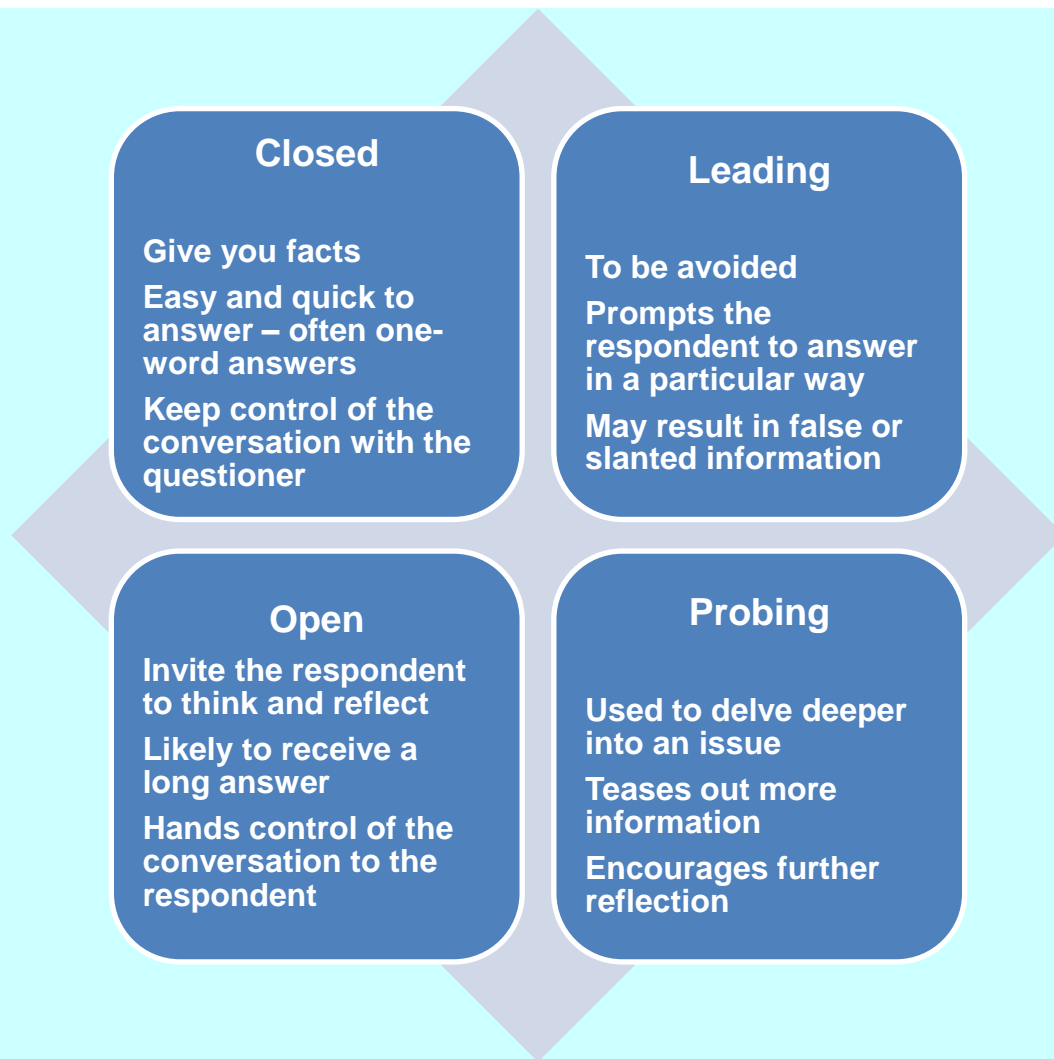
What sort of board are you?



2. Types of question



Types of question – Handout 1



Standby questions

If you are really stuck:

What went well? (WWW)

And it would have been even better if ...? (EBI)

And if you are really really stuck:

Is there anything else you want to say?

3. Possible scenarios



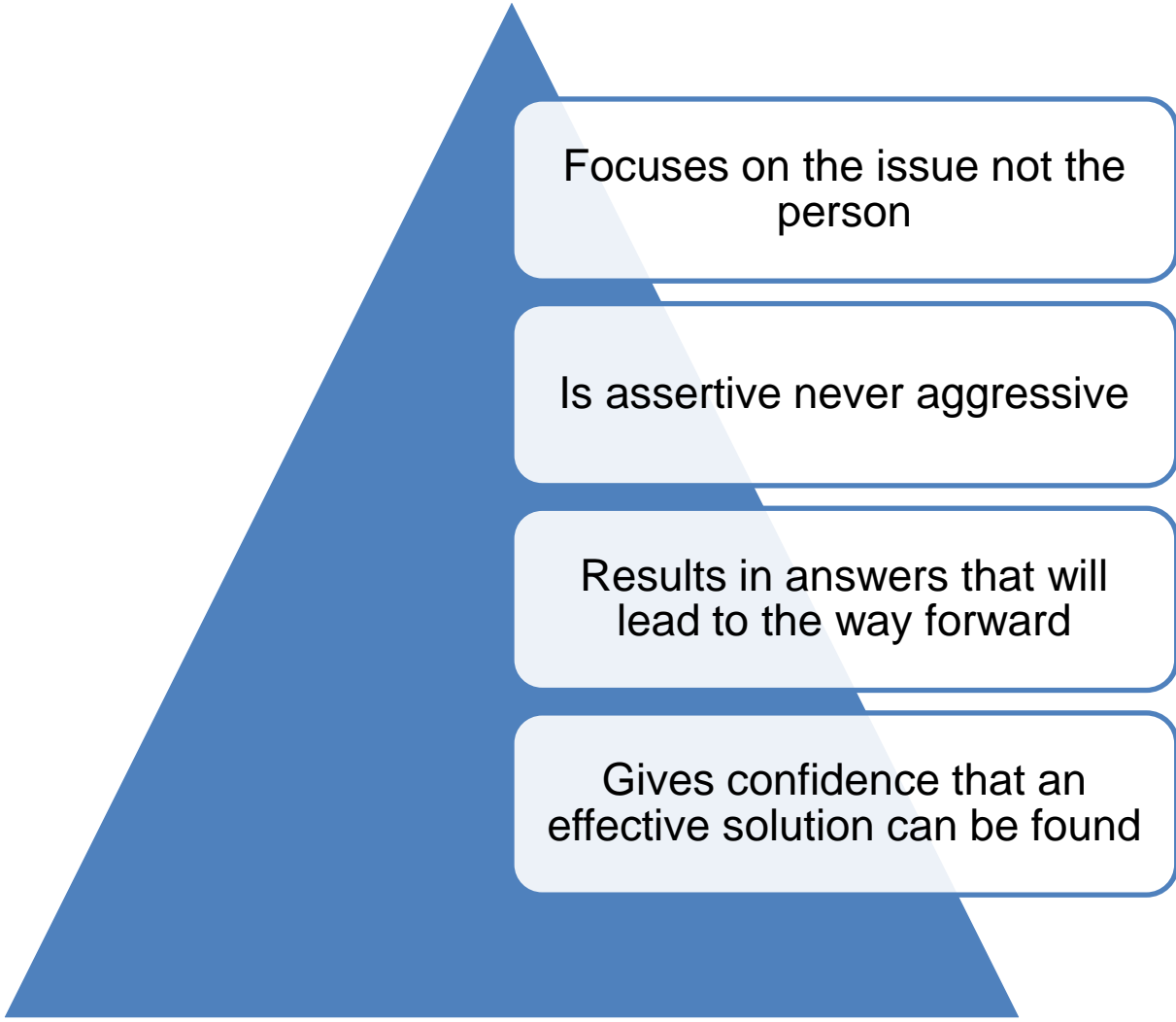
Question and challenge in practice – formulating suitable questions

1. Locate handouts 2 and 3
2. Read them both
3. Work on your tables
4. Be prepared to feedback

The concept of triangulation



Effective questioning



Focuses on the issue not the person

Is assertive never aggressive

Results in answers that will lead to the way forward

Gives confidence that an effective solution can be found

4. Escalating issues



Understanding conflicts of interest

- Governors and trustees have a legal duty to act in the best interests of their schools.
- Where there are personal or financial interests which may conflict with this duty, they must identify, prevent and record the conflict.
- Generally, governors and trustees must not be involved in discussions or vote on matters to which their conflict relates.

Question

**Which governors are most likely to need to consider
if they have a conflict of interest?**

When is a courageous conversation required?

Handout 4

Table discussions

Be prepared to feedback

5. Following through



Exercise

On your table:

How would you prepare for a courageous conversation?

Consider:

- What advice would you seek?
- Who would have the conversation?
- Would you keep a record of the conversation?
- What if it goes wrong?
- How do you follow up?

Planning a conversation

It will usually fall to the chair'

When electing the chair, consider if candidates could carry out such a conversation

Take advice – don't be afraid to contact senior people, speak to HR if necessary

Check your thinking – speak to a colleague

Rehearse how you will approach the issue

If HR issues of capability etc then make sure that comply with policy and best practice

It may well be inappropriate to take notes during the meeting

If so, follow up the meeting with an email summarising the conversation and agreed actions

If you feel that the conversation is going wrong terminate the meeting and re-group when further advice has been taken

The three core functions

- The governing bodies of maintained schools must direct the conduct of their schools with a view to promoting high standards of education
- The governing boards of academy trusts must fulfil their charitable object of advancing education for the public benefit

They do this through their three core functions:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. **Holding executive leaders to account for the performance of the organisation and its pupils and for the performance management of staff**
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent

Governance making an impact

- Set the vision and ethos, including what the children should leave the school having learned
- Stay strategic and focused on improvement priorities: leave the operational to school leaders, and delegate
- Don't get overwhelmed by compliance and reviewing policies: focus on principles, delegate procedures
- Recruit good school leaders ... and trust them to recruit good staff
- Ensure school leaders are equipped to do their jobs, including HR, procurement, legal advice, and CPD
- **Hold senior leaders to account effectively**

Challenging targets → school improvement →

outcomes for children are positive

Reviewing the session

This session has covered:

1. Board competencies
2. Types of question
3. Possible scenarios
4. When to escalate an issue
5. When to follow up and how

Any questions?

Evaluation

We value your feedback -
please complete the form

Thank you!

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www.nga.org.uk/training