

Being a 'Critical Friend'

The Governing Body provides the Headteacher and staff with support, advice and information, drawing on its members' knowledge and experience. In these ways the Governing Body acts as a critical friend to the School. **Critical** in the sense of its responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the School's effectiveness, asking challenging questions and pressing for improvement. A **friend** because it exists to promote the interest of the School and its pupils.

By being a 'critical friend' to the School this is an ideal way in which the Governing Body can help the School to work towards its goals and implement its strategic plan.

This involves:

- Monitoring progress
- Valuing and praising achievements
- Challenging low performance and poor achievement

Examples of challenging questions having received a report from the Headteacher or Subject Leader:

- How did you arrive at the conclusions contained within this report?
- Who have you consulted?
- What improvements are evident?
- How do you know?
- Has progress been as intended?
- What are the main areas for further development?
- Who is responsible for further developments?
- What impact is intended and how will we know how well things are going?

For most Governors this process will take place in Governing Body meetings where progress reports are received and questions asked. The skills of active listening and straight talking are essential in this process, if the role of 'critical friend' is to develop, there has to be a relationship of trust based on shared goals and mutual respect.

For Governors with specific responsibilities, i.e. the Special Needs Governor, Literacy Governor or Curriculum Governor, the 'critical friend' role may take place when working with members of staff or in committees.

It is not the responsibility of Governors to understand the professional issues involved in teaching. Governors will monitor performance by looking at the results, the goals achieved, the confidence of pupils and ethos of the School. Opportunities to 'value' and 'praise' achievement offer effective means of encouraging and motivating staff.