

## Headteacher performance management in England:

### Balancing internal and external accountability through performance leadership

#### **Abstract**

This article reports on research into headteacher performance management in England. The English school system couples organisational autonomy with close scrutiny of educational outcomes. The management of the performance of headteachers is a central aspect of such a system. The research involved a systematic literature review and the collection of data via national surveys, expert interviews and case studies. The findings point to three overarching conditions essential for what we identify as 'performance leadership': *relational trust* between the headteacher and the governing body; *situational awareness* by the governing body of the school's circumstances and the headteacher's lived experience of the role; and a *systems perspective* shared by the headteacher and governing body of performance management as one aspect of a comprehensive, interactive system of internal accountability, not merely an annual rite of passage. The study found that capacity in any two conditions offers a foundation for developing capability in the third. It also revealed the dominant role played by middle-tier structures in defining what constitutes 'effective' performance for any school or group of schools. The article offers insight into the changing landscape of performance expectations, for school leaders as well as for those who oversee their work.

#### **Keywords**

Accountability, appraisal, external advisers, governing body, headteacher, performance management, school principal

## Introduction

The introduction of performance management from the private sector to the public sector has been a major feature of managerialist and 'new public management' reforms spanning four decades (Gewirtz, 2002; Whitty, 2008a and b). Managing the performance of headteachers is considered essential to initiatives that aim to delegate responsibilities to schools while simultaneously holding those responsible to account. Headteacher performance management (HTPM) broadly encompasses two dimensions: the development of headteacher capacity coupled with accountability for performance (Davis, et al., 2011; Co-author and Other, 2004).

This article reports on a national study of HTPM in England with a particular focus on the role of governing bodies. At the time of the research the governance of schools was in the early stages of academisation with some variations in governance structure resulting the establishing of multi-academy trusts (MATs). The nature of these accountable bodies in England is now much more varied (see Table 1) and there is a need to research the full range of newly-emerging governance structures within MATs. We use the term 'governing body' to indicate the body to which the headteacher is accountable and the term 'headteacher' to include those with the title of 'principal'. The research aimed to identify ideas, approaches and key debates around effective performance management practices for senior managers/leaders in educational and other settings and to ascertain specific challenges to the effective implementation of HTPM. A national survey of headteachers and school governors and case studies of HTPM were undertaken. The case studies were carried out in state-funded schools which were within the remit of the local authority and academies which were selectively sampled to represent a cross-section of types, phases and geographical locations (Co-authors, 2014a, b, c).

The study addressed three specific research questions:

1. What are the key ideas, approaches and debates in the research literature and in current practice about performance management and appraisal of senior leaders that are of greatest relevance to HTPM in England?
2. What are the implications of ideas, approaches and debates for supporting strong headteacher performance and addressing marginal performance?
3. What are the key points for the training and development of governors and governing bodies?

The article advances the notion of 'performance leadership' as an ideal type that hinges on three facets: (1) *Relational trust* between the headteacher and the governing body; (2) *Situational awareness* by the governing body (GB) of the school's circumstances and the headteacher's lived experience of the role of headteacher; and (3) A *systems perspective* shared by all of performance management as one aspect of a dynamic, interactive system, not merely an annual rite of passage. Operating in concert, these three facets have the potential for achieving an appropriate balance between *internal accountability*, strong internal focus on student learning and support for high-quality professional performance, with the demands of *external accountability*, performance expectations set by the wider society (Elmore, 2002).

Following this introduction, the next section offers an overview of the shifting landscape of school governance in England and the implications for GB oversight of HTPM. Following presentation of the conceptual framework and design of the study, we present study findings in three main categories—governance environment, HTPM procedures and organizational capacity for effective HTPM. We conclude with a discussion around the implications for the restructuring of the middle tier on what we term ‘performance leadership’.

## **Background**

The English education system stands at the extreme of national systems with approaches to governance that entail highly developed forms of both horizontal and vertical accountability (Ozga, 2012). Concurrent with increased autonomy, the English system is known to be among the most centralized in terms of accountability requirements (Co-author, 2017; Ozga, 2009; You, 2017). There are compulsory standardised tests at ages 11 and 16 as well as a highly codified system of periodic school inspections carried out by an independent inspectorate, the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). At the same time, different types of school have arisen due to changes in government policy, in which stand-alone academies and multi-academy trusts (MATs) are free from local accountability to local government although still subject to some regional co-ordination directed centrally by the Department for Education.

In England, school governing bodies (GBs) have a major role in the management of headteacher performance. Every school or formally defined group of schools must have a GB responsible for the conduct of the school (Department for Education, 2017). The scope of responsibility of the school GB far exceeds the responsibility of what might appear at first to be comparable bodies for example, in the US, the school Parent-Teacher Association, or School Boards in Scotland (Raab, et al., 1997). The GB in England is a voluntary, non-executive body, whose responsibilities have dramatically increased over the past few years as the national government has sought to decrease the role of the English equivalent of the American school district, the local authority in school governance, and to increase the number of publicly-funded, but independent, state schools, known as academies, often working in MATs (Co-author, 2014). Robust, local oversight of school leader performance is crucial in the English system, in which school autonomy is central to government policies (Department for Education, 2016; Co-author and Other, 2017).

School governance in systems where there is a high level of school autonomy is associated with *vertical* accountability around specific nationally-agreed measures of school performance, while governing is a feature of *horizontal* accountability, networks of influence that enact features defined by governance (Hooge, Burns and Wilkoszewski, 2012). This tightening of horizontal with vertical accountability has placed the autonomous school GB, particularly in academies and MATs, under increased scrutiny. Governing bodies historically were constituted on a ‘stakeholder’ model, where various groups with an interest in the school - parents, staff, the local authority and the community - are represented (Co-author, et al., 2017). However, this traditional model is in the process of rapid change. A national report (Academies Commission, 2013:6) went as far as to suggest that there is a need for a radical shift in governing bodies’ capacity, knowledge and attitude if they are to take on both the expected leadership role and fulfil their legal responsibilities.

Concerns continue to be raised about the capacity of volunteers to defend the school rigorously; challenge for improvement and be a critical friend, especially within a highly-devolved system (Young, 2017; Ofsted, 2016).

The performance management of senior leaders in education has a growing body of knowledge, mostly practical and some theoretical, associated with its practices. A synthesis of evidence from the literature confirmed the lack of, and need for, systematic guidance and support around effective HTPM (Co-authors, 2013). Researchers in other countries have noted the lack of systematic understanding of the processes and outcomes of the PM of senior school leaders (e.g. Davis, et al., 2011; Goldring, et al., 2009). This shortage of research is of particular concern in England because of the direct links between the PM of senior leaders and the micro-processes of governing, and the macro-dynamics of governance in the school system more widely.

HTPM is among the most important and least understood aspects of the role of a school governing body. Before our research, evidence about the diverse ways GBs in the different types of school in England carry out HTPM was lacking. Little is known about the ways in which the PM of the principal shapes overall school performance, including the work of teachers and student outcomes, or how this relates to PM in the school as a whole. Such knowledge is especially crucial given the evolving structure of the educational system and the shifting relationship between the state and schools in England and elsewhere.

## **Definitions and framework**

Our approach to the understanding of governing, governance and performance management is from a pragmatist orientation (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Teddlie, 2009) seeking a middle ground between fundamental critique of 'performance' as an operative concept (e.g. Ball, 2013; Radin, 2006) and uncritical and prescriptive acceptance of performativity through technical-rational prescription (e.g. United Nations, 2011). This perspective aims to understand the intersection of governing and the management of performance systematically. At the same time, it acknowledges limitations of this concept and its interpretation in practice. Below we offer our stipulative definitions and then draw on the work of Bouckaert and Halligan (2008) for a stage-model that characterizes successive levels in the evaluation of performance.

### *Performance management and performance leadership*

The term 'performance management' is often used to describe the general process by which an employee and their line manager/boss evaluate the performance of the employee and negotiate objectives as well as developmental goals for a specific time period. A classic definition is the one by Castetter (1976: 22): 'assessments by a supervisor of a subordinate to draw conclusions about the performance of the subordinate to improve performance and to make decisions about terms of employment'. In the literature, PM is commonly viewed as one of a number of important management processes that include financial, human resource and strategic management (Halligan, 2001). The process of PM varies considerably and terms used to describe it - 'performance management', 'appraisal', 'evaluation' and 'review' - are often used interchangeably. The names that are given to managing the performance of education professionals have varied over time - staff appraisal, performance review or teacher evaluation being the most common. In England, in September 2000 the

Department for Education replaced 'appraisal' with 'performance management' (Department for Education and Employment, 2000) in their guidance to schools. Other guidance makes reference to 'appraisal and capability' (Department for Education, 2012).

In our use, the term 'performance management' conveys the broader sense of a superordinate entity, such as a school governing body or trust, taking responsibility for a subordinate's performance, in our case a headteacher or principal. 'Taking responsibility' may be interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Co-author (2008) identifies four separate aims of processes that might fall under the broad tent of 'performance management'—development review, performance review, potential review, and rewards review. Strategic leadership of PM entails the effective integration of these aims as a means of accomplishing an appropriate balance between internal and external accountability. This is what we term 'performance leadership'.

Performance leadership demands that those overseeing the process of PM have a clear vision of the state of the organization and where it needs to go, and use this vision to assess, motivate, support and enable an individual's everyday 'performance' towards fulfilling that vision. A GB that exhibits performance leadership in its management of the headteacher understands the health of the school and the direction the head is taking it. It takes strategic action towards assessing and supporting the head to achieve organisational aims as well as promoting the development of the head towards accomplishing those aims. Performance leadership entails crafting a strategic balance between an orientation towards improvement, developing an individual employee's fit with the organisation, and evaluation, holding an employee to account for their actions. Performance leadership depends on developing a dynamic balance between the twinned and complementary aims of improvement and accountability.

#### *A framework for evaluating performance*

The management of individual performance makes little sense unless the process is tethered to operational and strategic processes across the organisation. Bouckaert and Halligan (2008) elaborate a framework of PM that ranges across five levels of increasing sophistication of use and integration with core organisational processes.

- Pre-performance: expectations of performance are generalised and diffuse, with goals that are not defined in terms of performance
- Performance administration: ad hoc commitment to a focus on performance; performance measurement technically-oriented and instrumentally applied (i.e. tick-box and other administrative procedures not linked with performance improvement)
- Managements of performance: link between management and performance improvement established but concurrent systems in operation (e.g. head and teacher performance management unrelated)
- Performance management: distinctive features of coherence across the organisation, integration with other management systems, consistency across uses, convergence around explicit organisational goals, and comprehensiveness
- Performance governance: broad span and depth of control that encompasses system-wide coherence, integration, consistency, convergence and comprehensiveness.

(Bouckaert and Halligan, 2008:37-39)

The final two of these, performance management and governance, clearly require *performance leadership* to move beyond technical application and achieve strategic coherence across the organisation. The most advanced level in their model - 'performance governance' - may require leadership beyond the scope of an individual school or even a group of schools. This model is useful for understanding particular organisational contexts as well as identifying what is missing in the ways the management of performance is addressed in those contexts.

### **Research methods and design**

The study's design included a combination of methods encompassing:

- A systematic review of literature
- Quantitative data derived from two national surveys
- Qualitative data from expert interviews and a set of 20 case studies of schools and school groups.

The mixed-method research design was developed with four overlapping phases. The first phase was an initial scoping exercise which mapped the characteristics of effective PM of senior leaders; identifying acknowledged barriers to successful implementation; and drew out core lessons for leadership and management through a synthesis of 56 publicly-available works selected from an initial pool of 116 drawn from academic and non-academic sources.

In the second phase, the emerging findings around effective practices were used to explore current actual practice and barriers to implementation through 13 face-to-face and telephone interviews with experts, i.e. with those acknowledged as having comprehensive and/or highly informed views on performance management of senior leaders in a range of sectors (public, private, and not-for-profit).

The second phase also included two national online surveys: of chairs of governors and headteachers. We used the systematic review and interviews to design two online questionnaires, one for governors responsible for HTPM at their school, and the other for headteachers. The former took place in April 2013 (n=1,069) and the latter, with headteachers, in July 2013 (n=147).

The third phase was based on initial analyses of survey and interview data and the literature. We developed a sampling frame for identifying 20 case studies of schools and school groups around the country. The research included cross-case comparison of all 20, along with the development of ten stand-alone case studies and 12 vignettes of key themes identified in the case study data. (Characteristics of case study schools are summarized in the Appendix.) Finally, in Phase 4, the findings from each of the preceding phases were used to produce the final report which was published by the sponsor in the summer of 2014 (Co-authors, 2014a, b, c).

### **Findings**

This section reports the findings related to accountability and governance with regards to HTPM. Our findings from the cross-case analysis of schools and analysis of survey results are

grouped under four headings: a) governance environment, the general context for PM in the school or MAT; b) procedures, key aspects of the way HTPM takes place; c) use of outcomes, how the outcomes of the appraisal aspects of the process are used; and d) capacity for effective PM, implications as regards commitment to organisational development.<sup>1</sup>

We draw on quotes and observations from the 20 case studies to illustrate findings. A full account of our findings are reported in the final report noted above.

### *Governance environment*

We found the governance environment to be widely varied. This changing leadership landscape in England has been reported previously (Coldron, et al., 2014; Co-author, 2013) and our surveys and interviews highlighted that GBs were under considerable stress to cope with rapid change, including moving to academy status, which has increased since the time of the research (Co-author and Other, 2017). Table 1 provides a snapshot of the widely varied governance arrangements we explored in the 20 case studies.

	<b>Maintained School</b>	<b>Single Academy</b>	<b>Academy within MAT</b>
<b>Accountable body</b>	Governing body	Trust board	MAT board
<b>School-level governance</b>	Governing body	Trust board	MAT board/local governing body (LGB) <sup>2</sup>
<b>Basis of school-level powers and duties</b>	Legislation	Funding agreement Articles of association Legislation	Delegated by the MAT board
<b>Responsibility for school-level HTPM</b>	Governing body	Trust board	MAT senior executive

**Table 1.** Governance arrangements and HTPM responsibility in study schools

Many GBs were experiencing a very challenging environment and regarded HTPM as part of a broader set of integrated strategies to improve organisational performance. Comments in both surveys and case studies highlighted two areas in particular: the threat of competition for students and the increased responsibility that accompanied change in status from a local authority maintained school to status as a single academy or as a member of a MAT.

The threat of competition with other schools was widely reported as a concern particularly but not exclusively for secondary schools. Competition had focused the GB's oversight of the head and/or motivated the head to work with the governors in holding them to account for the leadership necessary to deliver promised change. One case study, a secondary voluntary-aided school in a disadvantaged inner city setting, was experiencing rapidly declining rolls due to competition from several academy converters and newly-constructed academies close by. An experienced head had been recently appointed, a new chair had been elected replacing a very long-standing chair, and a newly-arrived, young, dynamic parish priest had joined the GB. As part of the changes, which included re-structuring the GB, robust and well-structured HTPM processes had been implemented.

Changes in the status of a school were also having an impact. Becoming an academy for example meant a whole new level of responsibilities for governors with the LA playing a much smaller role, if any. As a governor made clear, 'The ante has been raised since we became directors of an academy'. Most GBs sought the assistance of an education advisor to help with the HTPM process: school improvement partners (SIPs) and external advisers (EAs) were typically viewed as the guide and interpreter of this process. Such individuals were often former LA employees who were now operating on their own, often in a freelance capacity. The role of the SIP and EA varied according to governance environment. In a maintained school, the EA was typically an employee or on a retainer with the LA. Academies are not required to have an EA, and their use varied widely, while MATs tended to develop their own in-house specialist expertise and were developing a variety of practices to HTPM. (For more on the issue of external advisers, see Co-authors, 2016.)

### *Procedures*

It was clear that the schools we studied, identified as evincing effective approaches to HTPM, were broadly following a standard set of HTPM processes – setting objectives; monitoring progress to meeting those objectives (in most cases); a review process where evidence that the objectives had been achieved was presented; new objectives were set, and pay awards and incremental rises were or were not made. These processes parallel those set out in the wider management literature (Halligan, 2001), as well as those that had earlier been promulgated by many local authorities based on central government guidance (Department for Education and Employment, 2000). Many governing bodies in our case study sites inherited from their former or current local authority HTPM models that had been in place for many years.

All of the case study schools that we visited took the GB's management of the head seriously and carried out the HTPM process rigorously. PM was important both to the headteachers and the governors we spoke to. In only one instance did the head's views on the process diverge substantially from those of the GB, with the latter judging the appraisal process robust and the head viewing it merely as a political necessity. Such consistency in perspectives is not surprising given that case study settings volunteered to participate in the study and many were selected specifically as exemplars of effective HTPM approaches across a wide variety of background characteristics (e.g. phase, location, pupils, and Ofsted grade).

Results from our national surveys of chairs of governors and headteachers differed markedly from the consistency of response from our case study participants. This may be because the sample of headteachers was a small one (n=147) and an opportunity sample. The surveys revealed much greater overall disparity between governors and headteachers in responding to questions about overall effectiveness of HTPM in their school, with governors (n=1,069) much more likely to judge the process as 'highly effective' than were headteachers. Figure 1 shows that one third of chair respondents but only about one sixth of headteachers judged HTPM in their schools to be 'highly effective'.

[Insert Figure 1.]

**Figure 1.** Governors' (n=1069) and Headteachers' (n=147) views on effectiveness of HTPM



Many more headteachers (13%) than governors (2%) considered that HTPM in their schools was ineffective or highly ineffective (Figure 1).

We found that where HTPM was effective, 'data' and 'evidence' in some form appeared to play an important role. There were many examples where governors had to develop their ability to interpret and make constructive use of data in order to play a full part in HTPM. This conclusion lends support to initiatives by Ofsted, DfE and others to provide governors (and parents) with detailed and easily understood data about the performance of their school. Most notably, the work of GBs towards productive and effective approaches to HTPM was closely linked with their ability to understand clearly the situation confronting the school and the specific ways that the school as a whole and the head and the GB needed to work together to progress. This linkage was especially the case for experienced headteachers who had taken over a school in difficulty. The national MATs we visited had made HTPM a keystone of the work of the trusts' Directors of Education with schools and local GBs newly-affiliated with the trusts. One national MAT had made clarifying and consolidating the process the fulcrum of broader management changes not only within affiliated schools but across the entire organisation.

We found that as with so many leadership processes, the effectiveness of HTPM was founded on high quality relationships between the principal actors – the headteachers, the HTPM panel members (usually a group of 2-3 governors, including the chair) and the external adviser/consultant. The quality of these relationships tended to be couched in terms such as openness, trust and integrity. Chairs generally talked about headteachers needing someone to challenge them and felt that good leaders valued that challenge. Some reported on previously ineffective approaches to HTPM that had been characterised by a too-cosy relationship between the chair and head or a chair unwilling to confront the head. One interviewee recalled that in his first term as governor, he realised how rarely the head was questioned. He remarked, 'Nobody would act as a critical friend and question the head'. The first time the chair raised a question he 'was rounded on by other governors and told not to ask those questions'.

Striking the right balance between support and challenge highlights the importance of the underpinning relationships. The translation of procedures across schools risks overlooking the importance of developing robust relationships. It may be that effective HTPM procedures can cultivate a sense of trust, but HTPM also requires trust as a precondition in order to be effective. The mutually-reinforcing interaction between procedures and trust relationships lies at the core of effective HTPM, as well as the creation of a robust environment for good governing.

#### *Use of outcomes from PM procedures*

The primary outcome mentioned by participants was determining increments in compensation or performance-related pay (PRP). The reward aspect of HTPM featured in effective practices and was closely integrated with all other aspects of the HTPM process. Again, as with the accountability aspect of HTPM, this aspect of the system may be open to misuse (Co-authors, 2016). Several case study chair interviewees mentioned the difficulty of retaining a highly competent headteacher at a time when they could be recruited – head-hunted - by others. In a competitive market for high quality headteachers, there are implications for remuneration. Such pressures compel GBs to focus on the quality – and

sophistication – of HTPM processes in retaining and recruiting headteachers. Some GBs were happy to award their headteachers what might appear generous pay awards, especially at a time when teacher salaries are fairly static, in an attempt to retain their services. With the diminution of the LA role, governors did not have access to benchmarking data, which could have implications for pay, especially in regards to gender.

A number of chairs noted that the connection was problematic. As one chair remarked:  
PRP values the wrong things: money rather than the kids. But people want parity and if paying people more can take financial worries away, that's good/ But money is a great de-motivator, a distraction. The real reward is making a difference to students.

Headteachers also mentioned that they found it challenging to 'initiate a discussion about pay' with GB members who did not have an in-depth understanding of PRP. In one instance, the head had not been awarded a point after what he thought was a challenging year because of what he felt was a strict interpretation of a very demanding objective by the panel. Important headway on the objective had been made according to the head, however the panel were not satisfied that progress was adequate. The head had subsequently earned two points for performance the following year, but the inflexibility of the committee and the pay decision was still on the head's mind.

A number of the GBs we studied were using HTPM as part of the process of managing the professional life of expert headteachers. This 'talent management' was important and seemed especially so for those respondents who referred to managing their headteachers in a competitive market for highly effective leaders. Ensuring that high performing headteachers were appropriately remunerated and had rewarding professional lives thus became a significant part of the HTPM process. In some instances, managing very able/long-standing headteachers entailed extending their role by becoming system leaders (National or Local Leaders of Education) or Ofsted inspectors. This strategy in turn created some difficulties, for example, does the head's performance in these roles feature in their PM? Arguably these developments - and others as MATs continue to grow and offer further opportunities for career development - will feature even more widely in future and will need to be reflected in HTPM processes.

#### *Development of organisational capacity for effective PM*

The fourth important aspect for effective HTPM that emerged from our data analysis concerned capacity and capacity building. Expertise requires an understanding not only of the school's data and how to provide challenge but in terms of reciprocal accountability, how to provide appropriate support for the challenge. There was evidence of the necessity for considerable high quality expertise for the HTPM process to be secure and to be so within the context of high quality GB processes. The EA has an important role in bringing expertise to the process where it may be lacking.

The surveys of both headteachers and chairs sought their views of the GB's expertise for managing the HTPM process. As can be seen from Figure 2 there were again important differences between the two sets of respondents, with governors nearly twice as likely to 'strongly agree' that their GB had the expertise required. [Insert Figure 2.]

**Figure 2.** Governors' (n=1069) and Headteachers' (n=147) views on GB expertise for HTPM

In one of the case study schools, increased autonomy through becoming an academy had impacted on their governing and HTPM practice. They were determined to improve the workings of the GB in all areas. They were committed to and valued HTPM and to ensuring rigour in the process. They recognised their increased responsibility as a corporation. As the chair put it: *'In the last 18 months we've upped the tempo re how we do things'*. In this case and the case of others, governor vacancies were being carefully filled – in some schools prospective governors were interviewed to ensure any skill gaps were being filled – and 'passenger' governors were being encouraged to depart.

One of the areas that appeared most challenging was GB capacity for identifying and supporting the head with individualised personal and professional development goals. This is a point where the EA, who was typically an experienced educational professional, played an important role (see Co-authors (2016) for a detailed examination of the role of the EA as currently practiced drawing on study data).

Increasing the provision and quality of EAs is only one piece of the comprehensive solution required to develop GB capacity to implement robust HTPM. This was more of an issue for standalone maintained school GBs than for academies or MATs. However training was a key item for both GBs and Trust Boards. Governors identified a wide range of training needs that pointed towards the most challenging *'pinch points'* in the process. The most common topics mentioned by governors for training and/or development that would be of greatest value to them in improving the quality of the HTPM process related to:

- the technical and legal formalities of headteacher appraisal
- understanding data
- issues around pay and performance
- managing relations with the head
- setting and monitoring objectives
- benchmarking
- external advice.

These training needs were reflected in the issues that came out of our research.

## **Discussion**

Our case studies showed that schools identified as following good practice were conducting headteacher *performance appraisal* in a similar way and were making use of existing guidance. Many of our case studies were integrating the processes of headteacher appraisal into broader processes of managing the head and the school through the astute use of performance information. We consider this more holistic approach and integrated use of performance information to be a hallmark of *performance management*, which encompasses robust performance appraisal. The distinction between headteacher appraisal and a more encompassing and wider application of HTPM is a matter of emphasis and scope, the elements of which are highly contingent on context. One crucial distinction is that effective HTPM can only occur when there exist explicit practices and shared understandings around the use of performance information for the overall management of the school.

The research highlighted how HTPM in schools is challenged by several factors of which the most important were:

- the growing responsibilities of GBs and their status as non-executive boards
- the increasing diversity of structures of governance (e.g. MATs)
- the scarcity of resources for, and guidance around, developing innovative solutions.

We examine these factors through the prism of three main topics: the importance of governing and governors; headteachers' investment in the process; and the organisational integration of PM. At the end of the discussion, we return to performance leadership and identify the attributes that were most strongly associated with strategic leadership of HTPM across the schools in our study.

### *The importance of good governors and good governing*

In general, we found that rigorous and effective HTPM is undertaken by governors with sufficient expertise, who view the process as important, and see PM as a key part of the governing of the school. The mix of expertise and experience available on the GB varied depending on the school's context and the conditions of the school. Expertise required on the GB often comes from governors' work in other sectors and in other formal roles. Sustaining and developing the expertise required was a concern of several GBs, who had implemented ways to integrate new members into the process.

Effective governing and HTPM hinge on robust challenge and generative support facilitated by constructive dialogue and a climate of trust. Conversely, ineffective HTPM and poor governing are both marked by a lack of dialogue, a sense of powerlessness, inappropriately placed trust and lack of clarity of focus. A striking feature of our whole data set was the way that effective HTPM was part of effective governing. In all the cases, it was clear that HTPM was securely embedded in the annual cycle of the GB's work. It would be surprising to find HTPM carried out effectively by an ineffective GB. Equally so, it would be rare to find an effective GB carrying out HTPM poorly. There is a good case for arguing that the way HTPM is carried out is a leitmotif for GB effectiveness. We argue that effective HTPM indicates effective governing; the two are reciprocal and complementary.

Managing the head's performance can be particularly challenging for governors largely because it may require the GB to move from the 'stewardship mode' of governing - where the head is part of the collective that takes responsibility for the conduct of the school - to a 'principal-agent' mode. The head in effect becomes the 'Chief Executive Officer' who is employed by the lay governors to manage the school. There can be a shift in relationships at this point and the trust that can be part of 'normal' governing relationships may appear to be under-valued. Interestingly, in a number of cases it was the external adviser or the SIP that enabled that move from the stewardship mode to principal-agent mode to be achieved relatively comfortably. The EA played a part in checking that the evidence demonstrating that the objectives had been met was appropriate, providing the review panel with information on school performance, mediating between the panel and the head over disagreements, ensuring that objectives set were appropriate/sufficiently challenging, and in some instances undertaking monitoring visits. However, such an important role also carried the potential for abuse. Such was the extent of the EA's involvement in some cases, the GB almost appeared to be 'contracting out' a large part of the management of the

process to the EA (Co-authors, 2016). However, the research did not directly seek the EAs' views on the questions put to the heads and governors which in retrospect would have been a helpful additional source of data.

### *Headteacher investment in the process*

Just as good headteachers want good GBs (Co-author, 2000; Co-author and Others, 2010), good headteachers want good performance management. Research has shown that investing in an effective GB can be hard work for headteachers (who often have other more pressing concerns) but invaluable in the long run. The head's role in ensuring their own effective PM featured as a theme in a range of ways. It was apparent through their commitment to the process (which was considerable in some cases); in the way they often ensured that the process was carried through thoroughly and undertaken appropriately; by them making sure the GB had the capacity to undertake the process; by engaging the services of an independent and expert EA or consultant to support the process. These tasks were part of the work headteachers frequently had to undertake to ensure that the GB understands its responsibilities and had the capacity to fulfil them (Co-author and Others, 2010).

Schools where HTPM was effective were adapting the process described above appropriately according to circumstance and in various ways. The adaptations may reflect the school's circumstances and its progress on the improvement pathway, the experience, expertise and overall performance of the head. In some schools and academies, the HTPM process had been adapted substantially, for example in the scope and thoroughness of the data collection on the head's performance or because of the challenging context in which the school was working.

### *Organisational integration of HTPM*

Returning to the levels of organisational integration of PM outlined earlier by Bouckaert and Halligan (2008), the procedure for HTPM in our case study schools, for the most part, falls under their level of 'managements of performance'. There is evidence of a clear link between GB oversight and performance improvement. However, concurrent systems may be in operation both in terms of roles within the school (headteacher, other professional staff, and other staff) as well as defining priorities across operational systems of the school, and strategic alignment of individual and organisational priorities. We did find evidence of clear efforts and some mature systems to achieve coherence across the organisation, including convergence around explicit goals, the hallmarks of what Bouckaert and Halligan (2008) view as 'performance management' as distinct from 'managements of performance'.

Finally, the MATs aimed towards 'performance governance' in their ability to set system-wide priorities and procedures. It is clear that the MATs served as an important structural element across trust schools to define acceptable and exceptional practice as well as what constituted appropriate indicators of performance, a role that had been assumed solely by local authorities in the recent past. Nonetheless, school-level GBs within the broader Trust have far more constrained responsibilities in contrast with the expanding responsibilities and consequent challenge taken on by counterparts in autonomous stand-alone academies or locally-maintained schools.

### *Revisiting performance leadership*

Our findings point to three characteristics that offer the conditions for supporting performance leadership: *relational trust* between the head and the GB; *situational awareness* by the GB of the school's actual circumstances and the head's lived experience of leading the school; and a *systems perspective* shared by all of performance management as one aspect of a dynamic, interactive system, not merely an annual rite of passage. The study found that capacity in any two conditions offers a foundation for developing capability in the third. The study also revealed the dominant role played by structures of central accountability in defining what constitutes 'effective' performance for any school or group of schools, and the inability of existing standards to elaborate that definition.

We are very aware that our study emphasises the easily identifiable 'appraisal' aspects of the 'HTPM cycle'. This is the element of PM that garners the most attention in terms of external accountability. We were equally aware that internal accountability, the on-going management of a head's performance by the GB, is in a sense continuous work. Of course, good headteachers will be effective self-evaluators and self-managers but as we found even good headteachers may value the GB's presence in 'keeping them on track', through constructive challenge and by being held accountable to their own vision of the school and its direction of travel.

In order to have the capacity to do so, the GBs that were overseeing effective HTPM were doing two things: they had explicitly recruited governors who had experience and expertise in PM as part of their daily work; and they had crafted clear plans and a succession strategy to broaden participation of governors in PM processes. Some of the chairs had worked with governors to restructure the GB so that committee responsibility aligned with distinct school priorities. In this way, the committees 'owned' various objectives and had the responsibility for deep understanding of that aspect of the head's work.

There is however another aspect to the way headteachers can be supported in their work and that is in the 'everyday' interchanges where the governors exert positive influence. These include governors showing appreciation for the head's efforts, seeking to motivate them, and offering headteachers helpful advice, guidance, support and encouragement. This kind of work is an important but undervalued aspect of *performance leadership*. We heard evidence of this kind of positive influence by governors, especially in interactions between the chair and head, and both headteachers and governors reported its beneficial effects.

In summary, we found effective HTPM to be characterised by ten features that align with the conditions that support performance leadership identified earlier. Effective HTPM is characterized by the following facets.

*Relational trust* involves HTPM that:

- is underpinned by sound relationships, characterised by openness, trust and integrity, among all those involved.

*Situational awareness of school and leadership conditions* involves HTPM that:

- makes use of a wide variety of data from a range of sources to inform and underpin decision-making

- results in the setting of meaningful and challenging but achievable objectives
- is appropriate for the stage of development of the school and the head.

*Systems perspective* involves HTPM that:

- is fully integrated with the school development or improvement plan
- is one aspect of a secure annual cycle of objective-setting and review coupled with interim monitoring
- strikes an appropriate balance among internal and external accountability, development and reward
- is evaluated and adapted over time to meet evolving requirements of individual circumstances and shifting organisational needs within a dynamic context of governance
- is viewed as part of an on-going and wider process of working with the head and all members of staff to ensure high levels of performance
- is integral to the development of overall GB capacity to meet the needs of the school.

These ten features across the three facets of relational trust, situational awareness, and systems perspective tie very closely with the issues that school governors themselves identified in our survey. We would argue from the research that effective oversight of the HTPM process is one of the most important roles played by the GB in the overall governance of the school. The challenge is to ensure that all school GBs are in a position to play that part.

## **Conclusion**

It is in HTPM that the GB reveals the extent to which it has successfully negotiated the demands of internal and external accountabilities and has been able to interpret and contribute to the head's vision of the school. A focus on developing the GB's capacity for effective HTPM can serve as a fulcrum for improving the GB's overall efficacy. Our case studies make clear that effective HTPM is an attribute of highly effective GBs.

There is further research needed to explore whether it is indeed possible to achieve dynamic balance between internal and external accountability through robust, local oversight of school leaders. This is particularly challenging for lay governors charged with oversight of performance within a constantly changing policy framework, one in which larger MATs may take an increasingly important part in defining mechanisms of support and oversight, assuming the role once played by local authorities. There is a clear need for further research of this rapidly changing educational landscape to discover how the emergence of MATs, especially the larger ones, is altering the processes of headteacher accountability and to consider the relationship of a head to the staff and students as well as to the school's governing body. Is it increasingly the case that the MAT CEO/Chief Executive and the school/local GB are both involved in HTPM? Is what might be referred to as the 'managed head' model likely to become the dominant management matrix in MATs? As Wilkins (2017) says this in theory tightens lines of authority and accountability from the schools through an executive team to a board of directors to the MAT CEO. Mansell (2016), however, argues that this is a structure which affords parents and local communities much less democratic influence.

The models of HTPM prevalent in MATs are worthy of further research although it must be stated that at the time of writing these are still in the minority with only 18% of primary schools and 36% of secondary schools in England belonging to a MAT (DfE, 2017).

This study has offered insight into the ways in which the micro-processes of governing shape the overall governance within a system that relies on multiple accountabilities (Coldron, et al, 2014; Other and Other, 2017). Our research contributes to an emergent literature on the effects of shifting accountability structures on the dynamics of governance in systems of education. England arguably serves as bellwether for those systems that are increasingly pushing towards greater devolution along with increased external accountability.

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<sup>1</sup> These headings are derived from the OECD's (2013:495) 'Conceptual framework for school leadership appraisal'.

<sup>2</sup> Multi-academy trusts vary widely in the organization of and responsibilities delegated to local governing bodies, with some MATs maintaining LGBs as an advisory council and others extending substantial autonomy to the LGB. See case studies MAT-A and MAT-B (Co-authors, 2014b).

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