

School improvement through ICT – guidance for governors

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Governing bodies are responsible for promoting high standards of educational achievement. Their key roles are to:

- provide a strategic direction for the work and improvement of the school
- provide challenge and support to the senior leadership team by monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the school
- hold the school to account for the standards achieved and the quality of education delivered.





How effectively is ICT used in schools?

The most recent survey about the use of ICT in schools carried out by PricewaterhouseCoopers for the DfES in 2004 indicates that less than 50% of schools are enthusiastic adopters of ICT and an even smaller number are using it effectively.

Follow the money

Were you aware that investment in ICT is often the second highest cost to school budgets after staffing? ICT equipment is expensive and it is important that the governing body monitors:

- what is being spent
- why it is being spent
- whether the spending has been effective.

The world of technology moves fast: today's must have is tomorrow's museum piece. This means that spending on ICT will be an ongoing cost to the school's budget. It is a long-term commitment not a one-off cost. Governing bodies need to ensure that they have a proper programme in place so that their schools can continue to make progress in the use of ICT.

Management and leadership

As well as a learning resource, ICT is a powerful tool that can also facilitate management processes. Schools generate and process vast amounts of data and information: an effective ICT infrastructure can help

immeasurably. ICT systems can efficiently collect and process information that the leadership team needs to assess the school's progress and teachers can use to help follow the progress of individual pupils.

Appropriately chosen ICT systems can provide information on:

- attendance
- progress
- exclusions
- reports
- assessment

and even what pupils are buying from the canteen or borrowing from the school library.

Research shows that when used effectively Management Information Systems increase the availability and accuracy of management information and lead to improved monitoring, evaluation and feedback from staff and pupils.

Intelligent use of information should enable the governing body to make sound decisions based on the evidence presented.

Time saving

In the long term ICT can save time, but it is not a quick fix, and in committing to ICT the school will need to invest sufficient time and energy to ensure that the system has the appropriate data entered into it. As a management tool ICT is only as good as the information it holds.

Training

Are your staff confident and competent users of a wide range of hardware, software and ICT applications? If not it is unlikely that the school will be able to integrate ICT across the curriculum.

Expensive hardware and software is of no value if staff do not know how to use it. You need a well planned and properly funded training programme.



Personalised learning

The Education White Paper *Higher Standards – Better Schools for All* (October 2005) emphasised personalised learning – tailoring education to the individual need, interest and aptitude of all pupils to help them reach their maximum potential.

ICT is an ideal medium to encourage personalisation. It can allow pupils to learn at their own pace and often in their preferred style. It can also provide opportunities for the learning to carry on outside school time.

ICT can be used to record pupils' individual needs, progress and attainment, and this information can be made available for teachers, to inform their planning at the point of need – usually in the classroom via a network.

ICT Safety

Governors have responsibility for health and safety in schools. This covers physical safety such as the positioning of the equipment and personal safety when using the Internet or email.

Governing bodies and schools need to be aware of the potential issues and risks of ICT as well as its benefits. It is important that the senior leadership team develops a clear strategy on ICT which defines roles and responsibilities for management, implementation and safety, including the school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). The Becta website (www.becta.org.uk) can provide more help and information on these topics.

But we have no ICT specialists on the governing body. How can we monitor whether the school is using ICT effectively?

Governing bodies do not have to be experts in ICT, but they do need to know the right questions to ask, and be willing to ask them.

As a governing body it is your job to set the strategic policy of the school to monitor and evaluate the policy and its outcomes and ensure the school is receiving best value. Questions you should consider asking the senior leadership team:

- What do we want ICT to achieve in the school in the next 5-10 years?
- What advice have we sought and who from about ICT provision in the school?
- Why are we buying this equipment?
- How will it be used?
- What training will the staff need and what will it cost?
- What outcomes do we expect from the use of ICT?
- How will its effectiveness be judged?
- Are we planning to enable pupils to access their work from home?
- Have we considered adopting the Becta self-review framework?



The Becta self-review framework can help governors and school leaders make best use of the ICT in the school.

What is the Becta self-review framework?

The self-review framework is an online tool which allows schools to ask fundamental questions about how they are using ICT.

- Where are we?
- How well are we doing?
- How can we do better?

The framework enables schools to look at ICT across all aspects of school life rather than view it in isolation.

The framework has been developed in collaboration with Ofsted, QCA, TDA and the NCSL amongst others to try to ensure a coherent approach to the evaluation of ICT across the education sector.

The framework helps schools to:

- understand the school's vision and direction for ICT
- find a straightforward route for improving their effective use of ICT
- plan future improvements to learning and teaching
- benchmark against established best practice in other schools
- ensure that their ICT infrastructure meets their needs, not only now, but in the future
- ensure that their school's investment in ICT achieves fitness for purpose and optimises the use of finite resources

- identify their strengths and weaknesses in current ICT deployment and use, as well as alerting them to key priorities for future investment
- involve all staff in self review

The framework covers ICT across the whole school and has eight elements:

- Leadership and Management
- Curriculum
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment
- Professional Development
- Extending Opportunities for Learning
- Resources
- Impact on Pupil Outcomes

For each element there are a series of strands against which schools can assess their use of ICT. Against each strand there are five levels for the school to judge where it stands and input evidence to support its view. At each stage the online tool provides schools with suggested actions to meet their individual needs. It enables schools to determine where they are, where they would like to be and develop an action plan to get there. As with all effective self-review processes it is intended to be a 'living'-document which is regularly reviewed and updated.

Where to Start?



It is not intended that the governing body should carry out the online self-review. The self-review framework is an operational tool and its implementation should be led by the senior leadership team. To be effective it must involve all the school staff and it must be seen as something they are a part of, rather than something that is being done to them.

The self-review framework can provide the governing body with the evidence it needs to enable it to carry out its strategic functions, to monitor and evaluate progress and make important decisions on spending. The governing body should consider asking the senior leadership team to use the self-review framework in order to ensure that a properly thought out ICT strategy can be implemented.

Before introducing the whole self-review framework the governing body may first like to discuss where it thinks the school stands in relation to ICT. The initial questions may well be:

- How do we as a governing body use ICT?
 - not at all
 - sometimes, we communicate via email
 - we receive all our papers electronically
 - we hold virtual governing body meetings.
- What does the School Improvement Plan say about ICT?
 - nothing
 - it is considered as a 'bolt-on'
 - it is fully embedded.
- What does the Self Evaluation Form say about the school's use of ICT?

A next step may be for the governing body to work through a simplified version of the framework by asking itself, what it knows about ICT in that area and what level it thinks the school is at.

The grid to the right may help.



Strand	A strength of the school	An area for development	No ICT currently used	Don't Know	What evidence do we have for our judgement
Leadership and Management					
Curriculum					
Learning and Teaching					
Assessment					
Professional Development					
Extending Opportunities for Learning					
Resources					
Impact on Pupil Outcomes					



ICT Mark

The ICT Mark is an externally assessed quality mark against which organisations can measure whether they have reached the national standard of maturity in their use of technology.

If the school is using the self-review framework then it may wish to go further and apply for the ICT Mark. Schools accredited as achieving the ICT Mark standard are demonstrating that they are committed to using technology to improve their overall effectiveness and efficiency.

For each strand of the eight elements there is an ICT symbol which will show whether the school has reached the ICT Mark threshold. The school does not have to be at the highest level (Level 1) in each strand to achieve this award.

Registration for the self-review framework is free. The cost of assessment for the ICT Mark ranges from £400–£600 depending upon the school size and phase of education.

The self-review framework can be found on the internet as an online tool. It can be found at

URL: <http://matrix.becta.org.uk>

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