

EVALUATION OF GOVERNOR MARK

What is Governor Mark?

Governor Mark was developed to recognise the difference governing boards make to school and academy leadership and management. It is a mechanism to achieve accreditation against an agreed quality standard. Governor Mark is a quality assessment process that identifies the impact of the governing board on school improvement and outcomes for children and young people. 'Historically, Governor Mark was created to enable governing boards to understand "what good governance looks like" and thereby engage in rigorous self-evaluation'.

Governor Mark provides a unique opportunity to evaluate the ***impact*** of the work you do **on outcomes for children**

- It is an opportunity to celebrate what you achieve in supporting your school(s) and academy(ies) through effective governance
- It supports ongoing board evaluation and continuous improvement and provides an opportunity to demonstrate how you strive for excellence
- Governor Mark will challenge your board to ensure that it conducts its business efficiently and effectively
- Working towards Governor Mark will help to develop and strengthen strategic leadership in your school or organisation
- Governor Mark provides evidence of your impact, effectiveness and compliance with statutory responsibilities to support the leadership and management judgement in Ofsted inspections

Governor Mark seeks to assess the performance and ***impact*** of governing boards. It offers a detailed evaluative framework by which governing bodies can develop their own response to a number of elements, identify and provide for additional necessary development in understanding current governance issues and maintain a rolling performance assessment programme.

The Governor Mark Standards and documentation, originally underpinned by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM), have evolved over time to take account of the changing educational and governance landscape. The most recent developments have built on the DfE Competency Framework for Governance and incorporated more flexibility to cover the needs of multi-

Independent Research and Evaluation

During 2018/19 Nottingham University was commissioned to undertake an independent evaluation of Governor Mark.

The research covered a range of research questions, of particular interest were:

- governor perceptions of Governor Mark;
- how it promotes school improvement and
- to what extent are Governor Mark principles embedded in governing board practice.

The research was very thorough, the full report extends to 90 pages, included questionnaires, interviews and document/ literature reviews.

We believe that the research demonstrates that the process is robust, evaluative and contributes significantly to school improvement by embedding the principles of strategic governance.

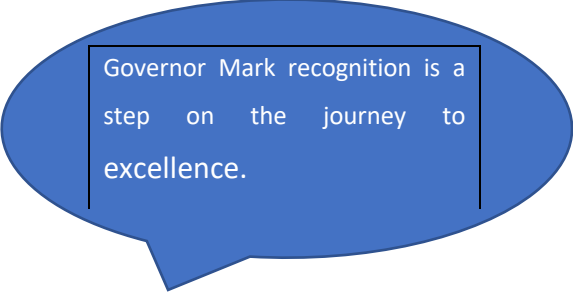
Summary of the finding and quotations from participant schools.

1. The process is developmental

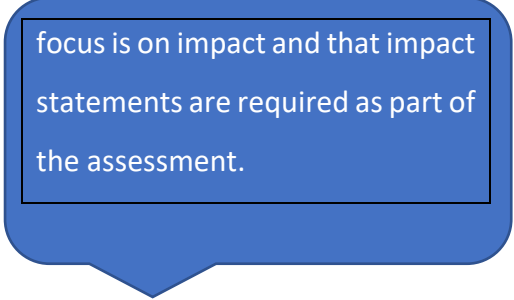
Participants comment that Governing Boards value the process as much as the award.

It was stated that:

- the process “helped us to learn about ourselves”, and that the process was positive and developmental, not audit driven.
- The process of ‘telling our story’ helped the GB to develop – ‘not just compliance but it enabled us to focus on creativity and engagement’



Governor Mark recognition is a step on the journey to excellence.



focus is on impact and that impact statements are required as part of the assessment.

Participant schools commented that the application was part of a wider decision to look for training opportunities to become more strategic.

Governor Mark was seen as a 'best practice framework'.

It was a motivational process and a way of renewing their practice'

It opened their eyes to what they should be doing

Governor Mark was perceived as broader, and more appropriate, than the 'technical compliance' approach of some alternative approaches. The head says that applying for Governor Mark was part of the school's vision to move the school to 'above outstanding'. Developing the governors was part of this journey and external evaluation of the GB was regarded as important. It provided an opportunity to explicate 'the best of what we do and why'.

A MAT CEO commented that, having considered other options chose Governor Mark.

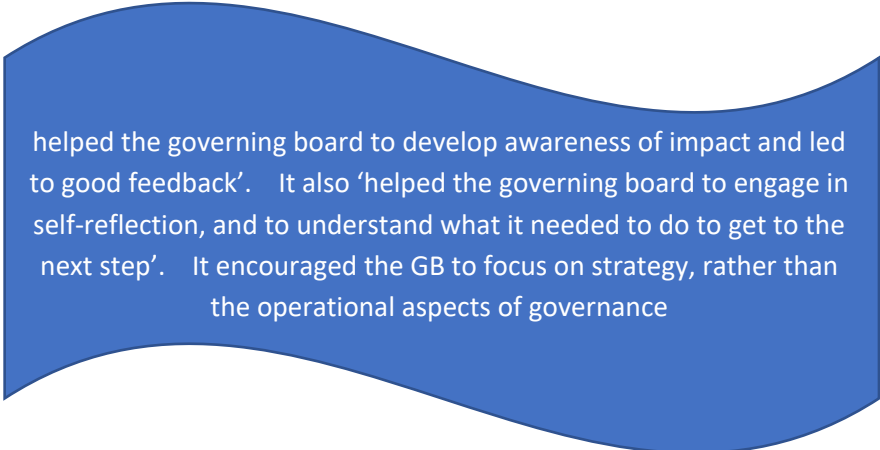
Governor Mark is a valued quality mark which has 'been around for a while' and focused on impact.

We found the GM process a well-structured self-evaluation toolkit which enabled the GB to effectively review existing practices and then work towards developing areas that required improvement. A consistent approach towards monitoring for improvements is now fully established and is standard practice; we have made small changes with excellent gains. we are currently going for re accreditation and I have used a small working group to do the deciding on what evidence to use.

The vice-chair from one large local authority primary school comments

2. Advantages

Feedback from interviews with Headteachers and Chairs of Governing Boards identified clear advantages of the process. One head commented that the Governor Mark process:



helped the governing board to develop awareness of impact and led to good feedback'. It also 'helped the governing board to engage in self-reflection, and to understand what it needed to do to get to the next step'. It encouraged the GB to focus on strategy, rather than the operational aspects of governance

The Case studies undertaken as part of the research project further identified advantages of engaging in this process.

- "A GB might not realise that what they are doing is not right" *Chair of GB*
- " Personally, it has made me a better governor, having to do all the thinking before writing made me realise what a governor should be doing, it was brilliant for me". *Vice Chair of GB*
- "It was a positive process for everyone, and not destructive, so everyone on the GB gained confidence". *Vice-Chair of GB*
- "I can see several advantages" *Chair of GB*
 - ✓ It helps GBs to be reflective, looking carefully at how they operate and at their effectiveness.
 - ✓ It helps in the collection of evidence to underpin effective practice.
 - ✓ It is good for the school, and the GB, to have external validation
- "It provides evidence for Ofsted and the SEF". "It gave the GB Confidence". "We knew that we were a strong governing board". *Vice Chair of GB*

3. Advantages for Multi-Academy Trusts

The MAT CEO outlines several advantages of Governor Mark:

- it encourages reflection
- facilitates dialogue
- encourages an empowerment culture
- affirms and celebrates what schools do well
- stress the link between the work of the governing board and school improvement, evidenced, by the impact statement

4. Integrity of the process

Participants stated that Governor Mark is only awarded if the governing board is instrumental in driving improvement and can demonstrate this, for example through impact statements. They must provide evidence. The process requires schools to show how the governing board is holding the school to account and influencing outcomes. The assessor visit is linked to such requirements. Participants also comment that Governor Mark has contributed to school improvement

The chair reports that, although they like to think they were following good practices anyway, they have been sharpened by the Governor Mark process. GM made them stop and think about what they were doing and how they were doing it, encouraging them to evaluate.

5. Case study evidence:

A chair commented that the Governor Mark process has contributed to school improvement in several ways. First, it was an integral part of the school improvement journey. Second, the GB was inspired by Governor Mark to develop an annual self-review process. Third, it helped governors to consolidate evidence in one place. Fourth, governor responsibilities were linked to the SIP, for example safeguarding and 'wider curriculum'. Governors are now much more engaged rather than being in 'responsive mode'. The head confirms that Governor Mark has contributed to school improvement, notably through linking governors to key priorities in the School Improvement Plan, for example safeguarding. Governor Mark also requires the GB to provide evidence of progress. She adds that Governor Mark was the 'driving force' to make governors think differently. Evidence is required in the

form of minutes and reports, explaining the purpose of activities, and showing specific aspects of school improvement

The school's Ofsted inspection (October 2015) followed shortly after the Governor Mark award. The vice-chair said that 'we were buzzing with it' and the inspector was 'really impressed' that the Governing Board had completed Governor Mark. The chair also commented that Governor Mark was seen as positive by the inspector. Governors mentioned it when answering questions and it was mentioned in the inspection report. The head added that, without the Governor Mark process, governors would not have been able to evidence good practice at the Ofsted meeting with governors. 'It gave them a deeper understanding'.

6. Impact of the process:

The overall impression from the research is that the GM exercise:

- a. gives the governors a sense of assurance in holding the school to account;
- b. enhances collaboration and co-operation between governors and the school, especially working with the senior leadership team;
- c. fosters an awareness of the roles and responsibilities of governors in the school community, and
- d. provides an effective means of governor self-evaluation with awareness of monitoring and developmental processes, especially in financial and resource use matters.

All interviewees report on positive changes to governance stemming from the GM process. They say that it helped the board to be aware of the good work they were doing.

The process has helped them to be better at recording good practice effectively and reflecting on how to make improvements.

Illustrative of the very positive views of most survey respondents:

Achieving this award has enabled Governors to thoroughly evaluate and understand their role within the school. They now feel confident in challenging the status quo which is refreshing as they bring a different perspective to school issues dependent on their skill set. We had our 'Outstanding' OFSTED Inspection shortly after achieved this award and they agreed that our Governors were strong and committed to the school. Governors felt very confident when speaking to OFSTED Inspectors as a result of the work they had done

