

Headteacher performance management

A guide for maintained school governing bodies

Governing boards conduct the performance management of the headteacher through a continuous cycle that includes an annual appraisal, where objectives are reviewed and set again for the year ahead.

An effective performance management process ensures accountability while helping to support the wellbeing and meet the professional development needs of the headteacher.

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The appraisal policy

Maintained schools are required by the Education (School Teachers' Appraisal) Regulations 2012 to have an appraisal policy which should detail:

- appraisal period key dates
- who will conduct the appraisal (the appraisal panel)
- appraisal panel size (normally two or three governors)
- the headteacher's right of appeal
- the ongoing monitoring process

The board must ensure it follows the process set out in its adopted policy.

The Department for Education (DfE) also has a [model policy](#).

In maintained schools, the headteacher's performance must be assessed against the DfE [Teachers' standards](#). You may also wish to use the [Headteachers' standards](#) as a tool to inform performance management.

1. The performance management cycle



Appraisal tasks	Timeline
Appoint appraisal panel members	July - September
Appoint external adviser	July - September
Annual appraisal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review performance against objectives - Set new objectives - Complete appraisal report - Make pay recommendation 	September - October
Mid-year review	February - March

2. Forming an appraisal panel

In most cases, the board [delegates](#) the headteacher's performance management review to a committee/panel, in line with the policy. The governing body must appoint governors to sit on the appraisal panel. Points to consider when forming the panel:

- Chairs are often appointed to the panel as they have the best understanding of the headteacher's performance.
- Avoid having both the chair and vice chair on the panel – this allows one of them to remain impartial in the event of an appeal.
- The panel cannot include governors who are staff members due to their inherent conflict of interest.
- Try to avoid governors sitting on both the appraisal panel and pay committee.
- A panel chair should be appointed as the main point of contact between the headteacher and the panel.
- Panel members should ideally have some experience of performance management and/or received appropriate training – NGA provides training through interactive [workshops](#).

While this is a board decision, any concerns that the headteacher may have regarding panel membership should be considered and a change made if the concern is legitimate.

3. Appointing an external adviser

The full governing body must appoint an external adviser each year to support the appraisal process. The role of the adviser is to:

- Provide advice and support on the legal process.
- Support with interpretation of performance data and other information.
- Advise on appropriate objective setting.
- Complete the necessary paperwork (reducing administrative workload for the panel).

The governing body should ensure that the adviser is suitably qualified and experienced to provide the advice and support relevant to the nature of the headteacher's role. The adviser should also be sufficiently independent and not someone who the headteacher has a close relationship with. In many cases, the adviser role is carried out by a local authority school improvement adviser. NGA's [consultancy service](#) also provides boards with external advisers.

4. Annual appraisal meeting

The timing of the annual appraisal meeting will be specified in the school’s appraisal policy. This is usually at the start of the academic year to allow the headteacher to set targets for senior leaders and teachers based on their own objectives. It is also important to establish the school’s strategic development plan prior to the meeting, as it will be used to inform new objectives set for the next appraisal cycle – it is usual practice for boards to [review their strategy](#) in the summer term.

Evaluating evidence

The panel needs to evaluate relevant evidence to help build an accurate picture of the headteacher’s performance, using a range of sources. The external adviser will also be able to assist the panel with the interpretation of data.

The headteacher will collate and provide relevant information, working in cooperation with any requests by the panel. The process of collecting evidence should be reasonable and proportionate, avoiding unnecessary workload for the headteacher.

The success criteria within the objectives will set out the relevant evidence to review. Much of this will be information that the governing body analyses regularly at full board and committee meetings.

Examples of evidence include:

External data	Internal data
Published pupil progress and attainment measures	The headteacher’s reports to the governing body
Pupil attendance data (such as that available via DfE data dashboard and reports)	School self-evaluation form (SEF)
Financial benchmarking data	Staff absence rates and turnover data
Reports following LA financial audits	Stakeholder surveys (such as parents, pupils and staff)
Ofsted report or other external assessments	360-degree feedback reviews

Pre-meeting preparation

It is good practice for the panel to ask the headteacher to provide a brief written assessment of how well they have met their objectives and performed against the headteacher standards. The headteacher should also describe what they think has gone well, where they need to make improvements, and any barriers to success. The headteacher may also be asked to consider new objectives for the next appraisal cycle.

The appraisal panel and external adviser will have access to the objectives, the headteacher's self-assessment, and all relevant evidence.

The adviser should meet separately with both, the:

- Headteacher, to discuss the headteacher's progress, professional development needs and potential new objectives, and
- Panel, to discuss their assessments of how well the headteacher has performed against objectives and standards, and what to cover at the appraisal meeting.

Conducting the meeting

The appraisal panel, headteacher and external adviser should all be present at the annual appraisal meeting.

The headteacher's self-assessment can provide a starting point for the conversation. The panel should ask the headteacher questions about the performance of the school and the headteacher's own performance over the past year, as well as on their workload and wellbeing.

Discussion should also cover future expectations including strategic priorities moving forward, career aspirations, and development needs – this should help to determine new objectives.

Questions should be open and encourage discussion, for example:

- Can you talk us through how you felt you performed against last year's objectives?
- What were the main challenges you faced last year?
- What do you feel is next for you in your career?

The panel should question and challenge the evidence in a respectful and positive way, being honest if outcomes have not progressed as planned, but also constructive in agreeing next steps.

5. Setting objectives

Objectives should be agreed annually between the headteacher and panel, with the help of the external adviser. This is normally discussed and confirmed during the appraisal meeting.

They must contribute to improving the education of pupils as well as to the implementation of the governing body’s plan to improve the school’s educational provision and performance.

Objectives should:

- align with the school’s strategic priorities
- include at least one personal development objective
- be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound
- agree the evidence that will be used to measure success
- recognise the full extent of the role and its responsibilities
- give due regard to work-life balance

The panel should also work with the headteacher to identify areas for [development](#) to help build their capacity and expertise, and support the headteacher in accessing relevant opportunities such as mentoring or coaching.

NGA recommend setting between three and five objectives. We have provided an example objective below:

Objective	Success criteria	Sources of evidence
<i>To ensure that the school has an effective pupil premium strategy in place, which is monitored and reported on throughout the year.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The approach to overcoming learning barriers uses evidence-based approaches, as identified by the Education Endowment Foundation or other research.</i> • <i>Pupil premium pupils in school make better progress than non-pupil premium pupils nationally.</i> • <i>School leaders provide reports to governors to demonstrate the impact that pupil premium initiatives have had on pupil performance.</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Pupil premium strategy</i> • <i>Pupil data (progress and attainment, attendance, and behaviour)</i> • <i>Headteacher reports to the governing body</i> • <i>Pupil premium link governor reports</i>

6. Appraisal report

After the appraisal meeting, a written report must be circulated to the headteacher and panel members. It is common practice for this to be completed by the external adviser. The report must contain:

- an assessment of the headteacher’s performance against the objectives and standards set for that appraisal period
- the headteacher’s professional development needs and what action will be taken to address them
- where relevant, a recommendation about the headteacher’s pay

The report may also include details of any discussion on wellbeing, workload and career aspirations, as well as the agreed objectives for the next appraisal cycle.

The panel should be open to feedback from the headteacher and edit the report if any comments are valid. If the headteacher does not raise any objections, the process is complete. If the headteacher disagrees with any aspect of the appraisal report, they can make an appeal – the procedure for doing this will be set out in the policy.

7. Pay recommendation

It is up to the appraisal panel to make a pay recommendation in line with the school pay policy. The external adviser can provide advice to help ensure that the pay decision is compliant and is justified appropriately by the panel. For the 2023/24 academic year, decisions to award pay progression must be related to performance, but the DfE has removed this requirement for the 2024/25 academic year onwards.

The panel’s recommendation, and their reasons for it, should be provided to the committee responsible for pay decisions as a written document. The recommendation should not contain specific details about the headteacher’s performance but should provide an overview of the outcome of the appraisal and the extent to which objectives have been met in order to justify the recommendation made.

NGA [guidance on staff pay in maintained schools](#) provides further information.

Confidentiality

The panel should report back to the full board to confirm that the appraisal has taken place, and new objectives have been set.

The appraisal report is confidential and should only be shared with those who need access to it such as the appraisal panel and external adviser. The panel may give a brief summary of the appraisal outcomes if appropriate but does not need to provide detail.

It can be discussed with the headteacher whether they are comfortable sharing their objectives with the rest of the board. It may be helpful to share them, particularly where they reflect strategic priorities, but the headteacher may wish to keep personal development objectives confidential.

8. Ongoing monitoring

Performance management is an ongoing process that should be seen as more than a ‘one-off’ appraisal event. Progress should be monitored throughout the year, with objectives amended where appropriate and opportunities provided to access relevant professional development and support – this should mean that nothing discussed at the annual appraisal meeting will come as a surprise. You should plan the activity needed to effectively manage the headteacher’s performance throughout the year while being mindful of their workload and work-life balance.

Termly board and committee meetings – the governing board will continuously monitor and evaluate progress made on strategic priorities at these meetings. This will form a large basis of the evidence that will be used to demonstrate progress towards strategy related objectives.

Routine catch up/one-to-one meetings between the headteacher the chair – these conversations can be used to further monitor progress as well as to discuss the headteacher’s CPD needs and [wellbeing](#). [The chair](#) plays a vital role in the performance management process and so it is essential that they have a strong working relationship with the headteacher that is based on trust, openness, and aligned with the same goals.

Formal mid-year review – we recommend that the appraisal cycle include a formal interim review. This can be at the six-month mark, but some choose to do this termly. This meeting is a substantive discussion where the panel can assess:

- whether the headteacher is on track to meet their objectives
- if any objectives need to be amended
- where the headteacher may benefit from additional support

There is no requirement to have an external adviser for the mid-year review meeting, but the board can choose to. If an adviser is invited, we recommend that this is the same person that was used for the annual appraisal.

Addressing underperformance

There may be occasions when the headteacher is not meeting their objectives or the expectations of the role due to underperformance. For any areas of concern, informal support should be provided to help enable the headteacher to improve in line with the appraisal policy.

If the headteacher demonstrates serious underperformance and has not responded to the support provided by the performance management process, it may need to be handled under the [capability](#) procedure. It is advisable to take HR advice in this situation.