

Governors' Update

March 2020

School Governor Service, Education and Learning, Department of Children's Services, Margaret McMillan Tower, Prince's Way, Bradford BD1 1NN
Tel: 01274 439400 e-mail: school.governor@bradford.gov.uk

Current Arrangements

Best wishes from the team at the School Governor Service to all governors and school staff who are striving to provide for children, especially the most vulnerable at this time. The Governor Service is continuing to function although everyone is working from home. In the future some of the staff may be allocated to support other areas of the Council if that proves necessary but there will be continued support for schools, including the clerking of governor meetings, throughout the current emergency.

If your school does not normally subscribe to the clerking service but would like cover for a meeting because of staffing issues then please get in touch and the team will do everything possible to assist you.

Updates from the Department for Education

The DfE has produced a March Update for governors which can be accessed [here](#) this outlines their advice for governing board meetings:-

'The department therefore advises against governing bodies meeting in person, and to instead adopt alternative arrangements, for example by using video or teleconferencing applications. These may include but are not limited to: Skype, Microsoft Teams and Zoom. Please remember that all parties will need to agree to these arrangements'

The department urges governing boards to be pragmatic in what they cover in meetings during this time, and to be proportionate in the decisions that they are planning to take. We expect governors to focus on urgent, time-bound decisions. We understand that you are likely to want to defer non-urgent decisions/agenda items until future meetings.

Boards should prioritise providing support to their school leaders and staff where needed, to allow them to get on with operational matters. School leaders should stay in touch with the governing board in a proportionate way, including providing information on the welfare of staff and pupils, so that they can retain a strategic overview of the situation and the school.'

The DfE then goes on to urge governors to ensure that the information about the governing board on Get Information About Schools, which can be accessed [here](#), is up to date. This is a legal requirement for all schools, including academies, but many are not updating this area and some in our District do not have any information about their governors on the site. Names of all governors and their terms of office should be there. Email addresses for Chairs need to be sent as well; they are not

visible to the public but are kept for use by the government when necessary, which may well occur in times such as these.

Included in that item is a link to the NGA document which gives governors more information about holding virtual meetings. Entitled '[Governing in challenging circumstances, Business continuity and holding virtual meetings](#)' it is aimed at governors and clerks. This gives directions for effective use of virtual meetings. All academies using the model articles of association are able to meet virtually. Maintained schools can do so if they have agreed that prior to the meeting. As many schools will not have agreed that the School Governor Service would suggest that, if there are urgent decisions to be made, which cannot be deferred to the next meeting then the Chair could make the decision to hold a virtual meeting using Chair's Actions and that decision could then be ratified at the meeting.

Further Details on Exams and Grades Announced

An update from the DfE on 20 March assured schools and young people that school leaders and Ofqual were working to put in place a system to allocate grades to students whose public examinations have been cancelled this year.

'The Government's priority is now to ensure affected students can move on as planned to the next stage of their lives, including going into employment, starting university, college or sixth form courses, or an apprenticeship in the autumn.'

This means ensuring GCSE, A and AS level students are awarded a grade which fairly reflects the work that they have put in. There will also be an option to sit an exam early in the next academic year for students who wish to. Ofqual will develop and set out a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible, and will work with the exam boards to ensure this is consistently applied for all students. The exam boards will be asking teachers, who know their students well, to submit their judgement about the grade that they believe the student would have received if exams had gone ahead.

To produce this, teachers will take into account a range of evidence and data including performance on mock exams and non-exam assessment – clear guidance on how to do this fairly and robustly will be provided to schools and colleges.

The exam boards will then combine this information with other relevant data, including prior attainment, and use this information to produce a calculated grade for each student, which will be a best assessment of the work they have put in.

Ofqual and exam boards will be discussing with teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that it is as fair as possible. More information will be provided as soon as possible.

The aim is to provide these calculated grades to students before the end of July. In terms of a permanent record, the grades will be indistinguishable from those provided in other years. We will also aim to ensure that the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in other years, so that this year's students do not face a systematic disadvantage as a consequence of these extraordinary circumstances....

We recognise that some students may nevertheless feel disappointed that they haven't been able to sit their exams. If they do not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis. In addition, if they do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam at the earliest reasonable opportunity, once schools are open again.

Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021.

There is a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations, and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade.

We are encouraging these organisations to show the maximum possible flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged. Ofqual is working urgently with the sector to explore options and we will work with them to provide more details shortly.

The Government will not publish any school or college level educational performance data based on tests, assessments or exams for 2020'

Update re School Finance for Maintained Schools

This is the second message from School Funding Team on the current coronavirus situation and is communicated following the government's announcement on the closure of schools made on 18 March.

Firstly, to repeat two key points in our (School Funding Team's) first message on two immediate changes to what we are asking of maintained schools:

- The application of the Surplus Balances Protocol (Intended Use of Balances) is suspended for 2019/20. This means that schools are not required to submit IUB returns / schemes in support of balances held above their thresholds. We will still wish, at an appropriate time, to discuss school plans for the use of significant surplus balances held at 31 March 2020, but we do not require schools to submit IUB returns before the 31 March. This is a suspension for 2019/20 only.
- The formal deadline for the submission of governor approved budgets is pushed back from 15 May to 30 June, in line with the final deadline for 3 year budgets. If schools are able to submit their authorised budgets by 15 May, you are encouraged to do so. However, the final formal deadline for submission is 30 June. We ask however, that schools that anticipate that they will set a deficit budget in 2020/21 contact School Funding Team at the earliest opportunity (and before 30 June) to discuss this.

Secondly, quickly covering a number of separate individual matters:

- We have not received any wholesale guidance yet from the DfE regarding any implications of the current situation on **school core formula and grant funding**. With this caveat, as most funding that schools are scheduled to receive in 2020/21 has been announced already and would normally be calculated on censuses that have already been taken (October 2019, January 2020), our assumed starting point is that the vast majority of core school formula and grant funding will be unaffected in 2020/21 by the current situation. We have previously flagged that the position of certain grants from / after September 2020 (UIFSM, Year 7 Catch Up Premium, PE and Sports Premium, FSM Supplementary Grant) are still to be announced. The values of the Teacher Pay and Pensions Grants from September 2020 are also still to be announced. We will continue to pass on information on funding as we get it.
- The DfE has specifically confirmed that the funding local authorities receive for the early years entitlements for the summer term is unaffected by the current situation. We will be publishing very soon some further information on our general approach to the funding of the **early years entitlements** in the summer term responding to the difficulties that the current situation may bring. This will be published on [Bradford Schools Online](#).

- Regarding **high needs funding (top up for EHCPs)**, which is normally updated monthly, on a 10th of the month census, for the movement of pupils and new EHCPs / EHCP revisions, we anticipate over the coming period continuing to fund schools based on the EHCP pupil data used to calculate March's top up funding but using the new Banded Model. So, we will adjust funding in April for the new Banded Model, but it is probable that no changes will be made over the summer term in the basic EHCP pupil data that this funding is calculated on. This is because it will likely be very difficult to complete the normal data capture and validation processes. In reality, it is unlikely that there will now be significant movement of pupils 'on and off roll' across the summer term and therefore, the March data will remain mostly accurate but for adjustments that may come from Panel decisions. If we are able to capture changes, including Panel decisions, we will incorporate these.

Unfortunately, we will not be in a position to send out immediately to schools a full pupil EHCP list showing the transfer of existing EHCPs from the old ranges system to the new Banded Model. We will confirm this transfer, and also we expect to manage any issues around the accuracy of top up funding over the summer term, at an appropriate time.

- There is a [communication](#) on BSO regarding **free school meals provision and FM catering cost review**. The government's announcement (link above) also refers to the provision and reimbursement of vouchers for FSM pupils. Further details on this are published here but are to be added to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/plans-set-out-to-support-pupils-eligible-for-free-school-meals>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance>

- As a minor point, we will suspend the **LTFM Scorecard** for quarter 1. No maintained schools will incur new points in Q1 (and points that were incurred in Q1 last year will drop out).
- We are aware that **cashflow** may become an issue, where maintained schools are not collecting income in the way they normally would and may also be incurring additional expenditure. The bank adjustment (where we owe cash to schools from 2019/20), because it comes after financial year end close, will also not take place at the usual time. Maintained schools will receive two cash advances in April as normal. We will further frontload cash to maintained schools by adjusting the second April cash payment a) by reducing the staffing and catering deductions applied to part budget share schools to 75% of their annual values and b) by uplifting the advances for all maintained schools by 10%. This enhancement in April will be recovered through lower advances across the remaining 11 months of the 2020/21 financial year. This adjustment is designed hopefully to support the vast majority of potential additional cash needs. However, if you identify that you have cashflow problems, please contact schoalfundingteam@bradford.gov.uk
- We are also aware that the current situation is likely to have some **budgetary impact** on schools. Two immediate causes will be loss of income (from, for example, before and after school clubs, facilities lettings, childcare, fundraising activity) and the necessity to incur additional exceptional spend (for example, supply cover, cleaning and hygiene services, site security, additional ICT equipment and licences). At an appropriate time, we will wish to collect information from maintained schools on the budget impact of this situation. It will be helpful therefore, if you could begin to identify and record these impacts in your school.
- Regarding the **procurement** of additional services and goods, we would remind schools of the requirement to comply with the [Schools Contract Standing Orders](#). These Standards Orders do give flexibility to procure goods and services up to a value of £10,000 without the absolute

requirement to invite written quotations and also do include provision that enables exceptions to the requirements of competition for higher value spending for "the execution of works or the supply of goods and services that are required so urgently as not to permit compliance with the requirements of competition". Authorised officers in schools should always comply with their delegated limits and with the approach to the authorisation of spending on urgent action that has been agreed with their governing bodies. We would encourage school leaders, as best as possible, to keep their governors informed of additional spending that is being incurred.

- Please can we also remind schools to remain vigilant to **fraud**, including invoice re-direction, bank account detail changes requests, bogus boss requests for payments etc. Below are some links to resources and information, including on specific coronavirus related scams.

<https://personal.natwest.com/personal/fraud-and-security/fraud-guide.html>

<https://www.business.natwest.com/business/security/common-business-scams.html>

<https://www.business.natwest.com/business/security.html>

If you come across any potential fraud attempt, please let us know via schoalfundingteam@bradford.gov.uk

Thirdly, covering the 2019/20 **financial year end closedown**:

- We would ask that schools continue to prepare as best as possible for the completion of the financial year end as set out in our current guidance.
- We ask, if you are able to do so and have not already, to inform us at schoalfundingteam@bradford.gov.uk as soon as possible if you will have a problem meeting the current year end timetable. This will help our general understanding of what is going on.

SEND Update

An open [letter](#) has been sent by Vicky Ford MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families outlining guidance on the support available for vulnerable children during the present situation. It has been requested that this letter be circulated as widely as possible. It gives links to several other important papers and explains the duties of the local authority.

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education

Governors are reminded that Relationships Education in Primary Schools and Relationships and Sex Education in Secondary Schools will become compulsory subjects from September 2020. Governors have a statutory duty to consult on the Policy that they wish to put in place and this may have been interrupted by the school closures. Governors could ask parents to provide feedback electronically which would then be considered by governors prior to the approval of the Policy. If schools are holding virtual meetings then they need to remember that the papers for those meetings need to be circulated 7 days in advance of the meeting.

Afterword

The next edition of the update will be sent out during the next half term. If any urgent updates are needed for governors then those will be sent out when they are released. Best wishes to all from all at the School Governor Service.