



# Governors' Update

## May 2020

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### Current Arrangements and Council Updates

The Governor Service is continuing to function although everyone is currently working from home. So please continue to contact us with your queries. 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.

All Chairs have been sent updates from the team and any further urgent information will be sent out as soon as it becomes available. This document includes information on some changes that have been announced since the last update.

The current reduction in the number of governing board and other meetings does, however, give governors, who are not otherwise engaged, the opportunity to consider their roles and whether their practices can be improved. Some suggestions on ways to do that are included later.

#### **Governor Terms of Office**

The NGA has advised that, by agreement at a meeting which is noted in the minutes, elected governors' terms can be extended until the autumn. Please note that this does not mean that the governor involved has been reappointed for another four years –it is just an extension of the current term. If a school wishes to proceed with an election then the need to contact all those eligible to vote and the provision of a secret ballot are the two areas that must be ensured. If your school normally has difficulty in filling parent governor vacancies then a request for nominations may be as far as would be needed and that could be considered. The normal systems should be followed for appointed governors such as co-opted, LA and Foundation governors.

Please remember that, if a governor's term is renewed – not extended, S 128 check should be completed if one has not already been done for that governor.

#### **Appointment of Chairs and Deputies**

If the term of office of the Chair of your Governing Board ends between now and September then this needs to be considered at a meeting before the end of this academic year in case there needs to be an urgent decision made before September.

In addition, there needs to be at least one other governor who is approved to take those decisions in the event of the Chair not being able to do so. If the Board does not currently have a Vice Chair then one should be appointed and, if both the Chair and Vice Chair are Shielding or vulnerable, it may be thought appropriate to appoint an additional governor to act in an emergency.

## **Maintenance of Get Information About Schools (GIAS)**

Both maintained schools and academies are supposed to ensure that the information on GIAS is kept up to date and this includes information about governors.

It appears that not all schools are complying with their legal requirements in this respect. The DfE recently reminded governors of the need to do so as, although the information is not available to the public, the name and contact details for the Chair is supposed to be provided so that the DfE can contact the Chair if necessary. The DfE noted that this might be needed as a result of the current situation and urged schools to ensure that the updates were made. Details of all other governors and their terms of office should also be posted although the email addresses of these governors are not published.

## **Updates from the Department for Education**

### **SEND – Changes to the law on education, health and care needs assessments and plans due to Coronavirus**

The DfE has made amendments to the regulations to allow the extension of certain statutory timescales until 25 September 2020. These are designed to allow parties to the assessments to use their best endeavours to meet timescales for assessments and plans rather than making those an absolute requirement. Full details are available [here](#). SEND Governors may wish to discuss the ability of the school SEND team to meet timescales and what preparations are being made for the support that may be needed when SEND children return to school.

### **Get Technology Support for Children and Schools during Coronavirus**

Governors may well have heard of this offer from the government. The Department for Education will provide the following for some disadvantaged children and young people who do not currently have access to them from other sources, such as their school:

- digital devices (laptops and tablets)
- internet access

#### **Who can receive digital devices and internet access?**

Laptops and tablets will be provided for disadvantaged families, children and young people who do not currently have access to them through another source, such as their school. Digital devices can be requested for:

- care leavers
- children and young people aged 0 to 19 with a social worker
- disadvantaged year 10 pupils

Internet access will be provided through 4G hotspot devices for any of the following people who do not currently have it:

- care leavers
- young people aged 11 to 19 with a social worker
- disadvantaged year 10 pupils

People aged 16 to 19 without a suitable device for education may be eligible for support through the [16 to 19 Bursary Fund](#).

There is an online application system and the devices should be delivered during May and June. Full details of the scheme are available [here](#)

### **School Reopening**

This is a topic that is currently awaiting an announcement from the Government.

The latest guidance was from Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, who [has confirmed that he expects that schools will be returning in phases](#), similar to models that European countries have planned. Speaking in front of the Commons Education Select committee, he stated:

*'Just a couple of weeks ago I commissioned SAGE to set up a sub-group to look at the particular*

*issues of opening schools, making sure that when schools are open it's done in the best possible way with the very best scientific and medical advice.'*

However, he clarified that although he is waiting on the particularities of the advice he does 'expect schools to be opened in a phased manner.' While schools are not expected to be opening to all pupils for some time, [pupil numbers have risen by 1% to 1.9% since the Easter break](#) while 79% of school provisions are currently still open.

The news came as government medical advisor, Professor Jonathon Van-Tam, [announced it would be 'very difficult' for schools](#) to open while maintaining social distancing measures.

Any definite information the School Governor Service receives will be shared with governors as soon as possible.

### **Remote Education during Coronavirus**

This page is regularly updated by the DfE with the latest update on 5 May. It includes resources and guidance for schools including Safeguarding guidance and resources. If governors wish to check that they and their school leaders are using the latest guidance, it is available [here](#)

## **Ofsted Update**

### **Inspection reports and management information**

A number of schools, further education providers and early years providers have contacted Ofsted, asking them to publish the report of their recent inspection. Ofsted had said that they would publish those reports only when providers reopen as normal for all children/students. They are now writing to all providers with reports in the pipeline to ask whether they would like their report published as soon as possible. If they say yes, Ofsted will publish their report shortly.

Ofsted also continue to publish statistics and transparency information and will publish management information on inspections carried out up to the suspension.

## **Updates from the NGA**

### **Annual Survey**

The NGA have published their governor survey for the year and are inviting all governors from every type of school to take part and tell them about their experiences as a governor and views on topical education policy and events.

'Whatever your role on the governing board, however long you have been involved in governance, we value the views and experience of all school governance volunteers in England. Once you have started the survey, you can save and return to your answers whenever you like before submitting them. The survey closes on Tuesday 26 May at 5pm.'

You can find the link to the survey [here](#)

### **Virtual Meetings**

The NGA have also produced a protocol for Virtual meetings and have expressed the view that meetings should be held by conference call or via the internet rather than by email as this did not provide immediate feedback.

### **Impacts of Covid -19 on Governance – joint research project with Ofsted**

NGA, together with Ofsted, is exploring the short-term and long-term impacts of COVID-19 and its implications on governing boards and their school/trust through joint research with Ofsted.

'In this complementary piece of work to the annual school governor survey conversations with

governors and trustees will provide more detail on how governing boards are continuing to support and challenge schools during these difficult times, how their priorities have changed and how they are thinking about and preparing for the issues they may need to address when schools begin to reopen. It aims to extend the understanding of the role of governance during this period and help schools and trusts be better prepared for the future challenges.

Experiences emerging from the interviews and focus groups will shape the understanding of how governing boards have responded to the pandemic and this will inform the guidance and future practice of NGA, Ofsted and the wider education sector.' Please access the consultation [here](#)

### **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): INFORMATION FOR GOVERNING BOARDS**

The NGA has advised that Governing Boards should support schools in dealing with bereavements.

'As well as taking care of themselves and those closest to them, those governing will want to demonstrate their school's caring ethos by recognising how bereavement has affected pupils and staff, and by providing the support needed to cope. Whilst bereavement is not an easy subject to cover, it's important to recognise that the school simply having an idea of what to do can make a difference to a grieving child or member of staff and therefore to their families.

#### **Encourage your school to develop its approach**

Whilst there is no definitive approach that equips schools to deal with bereavement, there are important steps towards putting support and care in place. School leaders may take the initiative to raise this issue with their governing boards but, if not, governing boards should encourage their headteacher/CEO to give thought to it.

Discuss how the following steps are taken in your context:

**The sensitive investigation of what has happened** – begins when the school communicates to the wider community that it wants to know about any bereavement that has taken place. This includes non COVID-19 related deaths as it is likely that all deaths during this period will have been more poignant given that the usual funeral arrangements and mourning rituals are not taking place. The governing board will want to be assured that the school has in place systems that will ensure that the right person makes personal contact with those affected, asking them to let them know about the bereavement, and how it has affected them. The information collected will inform the initial response, for example sending an appropriate message of condolence, and the beginning of the journey of support and care. It should also act as the trigger for support to others, particularly peer and friendship groups.

**Equipping staff to give the support and care that is needed** – governing boards and school leaders will want to discuss how their school's pastoral policies cover bereavement support, and promote and prioritise relevant CPD throughout the school. It is likely that there will be time and resource implications which should be taken into consideration.'

### **Support for home learning from Education Endowment Federation (EEF)**

The EEF is continuing to provide information and resources to support schools in their provision for children and families. There are resources and advice on ways to make the learning more effective when working with children who are at home. Their website can be accessed [here](#) and governors may wish to ask questions about the systems used to monitor the learning that is taking place and the resources that are being used.

### **Update re School Finance for Maintained Schools**

Many Governing Boards have now begun to meet virtually using a variety of systems to do so. As the budgets for maintained schools have to be submitted by 30 June at the latest all maintained schools

will need to have at least one meeting, either maintaining social distancing or meeting virtually before that date to agree the budget for submission. **Please note that this cannot be delegated to the Chair to approve as there is no reason why the Board cannot meet before the due date and also because it is not a decision that can legally be delegated to a single governor.**

There has also been a reminder from the Finance Team:-

**SFVS 2019/20** – We still expect schools to submit their SFVS returns that were due to be completed by 31 March 2020. We wish these returns to be appropriately authorised prior to submission and we understand that there may be delay in schools being able to achieve this due to the current circumstances. We will begin to contact schools that are yet to submit their SFVS returns at an appropriate time

It is suggested that any school that has not yet submitted the return should add the topic to the agenda for their next meeting.

## Topics for Governors to Consider during and after the Lockdown

### **The structure and schedule of Governing Board and Committee meetings**

Many Governing Boards are only planning to hold one meeting this term, which will necessitate deferring some items which would otherwise have been discussed. If the lockdown is only reduced gradually it may be that governors need to have an oversight of the planning for the readmission of students and the systems that need to be put in place to enable that to be done safely. Schools will have already thought of some topics that need to be covered in this area.

In addition many Governing Boards have operated with the same number and type of meetings for a number of years without reviewing the meeting schedule and its effectiveness in meeting the needs of the school.

Looking at the topics considered by the Board over the last few years and looking ahead to any medium and long term plans for the school would enable the Board to consider the most effective structures and meeting schedule to ensure all aspects of the school plans are included while at the same time only holding the necessary number of meetings to enable that. A study of the topics covered by the Board and whether all aspects of the remit of committees are being considered would probably be very helpful in planning for the future. As many governors may not be as busy as would normally be the establishment of a working party to look at these matters could be a useful initiative.

### **Succession Planning**

As the terms of office of many Chairs of Governors may normally be considered at the end of the summer term or the start of the new term in September it appears to be a good opportunity for governing boards to consider succession planning if the Chair intends to step down. It would be good practice for the Chair to inform the Governing Board if the intention is not to continue so that there could be some discussion of the skills the Governing Board needs to oversee the next stages of the school's development. Any change in Chair should proceed smoothly and it is not fair on a Chair when that role has to be continued because no one else wishes to become Chair. If there is a lack of people willing to serve as Chair then it may be that the Board needs to look at recruiting someone with the necessary skills to do so. As there are currently fewer meetings it would seem the ideal opportunity for succession planning to be put in place,

## **Review of Training**

It is often considered the role of the Vice Chair to look at the training undertaken by governors.

Questions that could be asked are:

- Have there been any new governors who have not yet completed any training?
- Are there governors who have been in that role for a number of years and who have not updated their training for some time?
- Does the school have a number of governors in need of training in a specific area?

If the answer to any of those questions is yes then it is recommended that the governors in question attend some training in the areas needed or the Board organise some bespoke governor training for their school.

Currently the School Governor Service bespoke training is being piloted virtually with a view to rolling out virtual training more widely shortly, including Introduction to Governance. The SGS are also involved in the provision of Training for Clerks and for Chairs as part of the NGA offer to schools.

Schools are, of course, free to access training from SGS or another approved provider but it is important that governors and clerks do update their training as necessary to enable them to fulfil their roles effectively and Vice Chairs are encouraged to look at this topic on behalf of their Boards.

## **Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education And Health Education**

Governors are reminded that Relationships Education in Primary Schools and Relationships and Sex Education in Secondary Schools and Health Education in both will become compulsory subjects from September 2020. Governors of schools where the new policy for Relationships Education or Relationships and Sex Education have not yet been approved need to ensure that the policy is approved in accordance with the guidelines and that curriculum details are finalised for both of the compulsory subjects so that everything is in place for when the lockdown ends.

## **Afterword**

The next edition 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.