

GOVERNING MATTERS

September 2022 | nga.org.uk

OUR SURVEY SAYS

Top strategic priorities for the
school/trust you govern:

1.	ENSURING A BROAD AND BALANCED CURRICULUM	70%
2.	IMPROVING ATTAINMENT	62%
3.	SUPPORT FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	47%
4.	PUPIL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING	46%
5.	STAFF WELLBEING INCLUDING WORKLOAD	45%

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STORM WARNING:
THE CHALLENGES FACING
SCHOOL LEADERS



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JOIN NGA

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and governance professionals of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and governance professionals at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

For more information on joining NGA, visit www.nga.org.uk/membership

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“WHY HAVE WE SEEN NO MOVEMENT SINCE 2014?”



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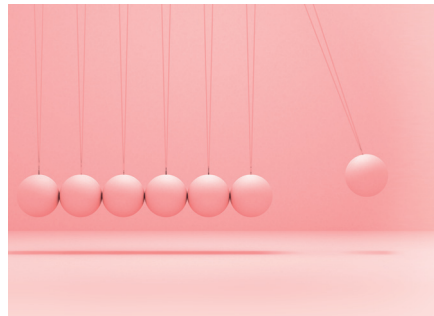
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A word from the editor

Sam Henson, director of policy and communications, on how governing boards offer hope to the next generation in the face of adversity

I'm writing this on the day that students across the country are nervously travelling to pick up their GCSE results – a feeling I still remember well. Of course, I didn't have to deal with the disruption to learning that pupils have had during the past few years. Looking back, I have no doubt that I would not have had the same opportunities had it not been for my teachers seeing something in me that I didn't see.

Growing up is hard at the best of times. But all of us – students, families, teachers, leaders and the vast army of volunteers so generously serving our schools and trusts by governing – are facing especially anxious times. I'm always amazed by the hope and aspiration that those governing our schools breathe into the system with each new school year that arrives. This is something that we are going to need in ample supply as schools face the realities of the soaring cost of living.

On page 16, we look at the results of the 2022 NGA annual governance survey. There are three full reports, which are available on the NGA website. They address the challenges and barriers you face as governors – and balancing the budget is by far the most prominent of these. The strategies and initiatives governing boards are using to deal with those challenges are characterised by hope and aspiration, but it is becoming harder to be optimistic as schools face the highest cost pressures in living memory. Despite those pressures, volunteers still choose to govern because of the hope they continue to have for the future generation – that driving ambition to deliver the best possible outcomes for pupils despite the obstacles the world continues to present.

As we look forward to a new school year, it can be tempting to take a stance of 'battening down the hatches'. But from what I have seen, that is not what

“Governing boards are vision-setters; working with leaders, they are the ambition-drivers”

governing boards do. Governing boards are vision-setters; working with leaders, they are the ambition-drivers. This role has always been so important, but given the context of the past couple of years, its significance has perhaps never felt so pertinent.

This came across clearly in our summer seminar series, reported on in several articles in this edition. From the leadership challenge (page 22) to disadvantage (page 12), and from greener governance (page 28) to pupil wellbeing (page 26), the role governance will play in addressing these issues in the coming year cannot be undervalued. And the NGA simply won't let it be undervalued – in fact, we mean to continue to shout from the rooftops about the incredible work you have done and will continue to do. On page 32, communications professional Anna Pedroza talks about her work on the NGA's Visible Governance campaign, from launching our new animation on the role of governance to focusing on the positive effect governance can have on pupils and staff.

While the daily disruption and worries about the future continue, governance in our schools triumphantly and consistently offers society something different. A way of connecting schools to community, a way of breathing vast experiences, ways of thinking and different ideas into the running of the lifeblood of the future of our communities – our pupils. Everyone at NGA wishes you the very best as the new school year gets under way. 🙌

MEMBERS ASSEMBLE

The AGM and Annual Conference will be held on Saturday 12 November 2022 at the Eastside Rooms, Birmingham. The event is scheduled to be held face-to-face, but if local COVID-19 restrictions are in place the event will go ahead remotely. The full legal notice of the AGM will be emailed to all members and posted on the NGA website in accordance with the Articles of Association.

The National Governance Association (a company limited by guarantee)
Registered No: 3549029,
Companies Act 2006
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN under the Act mentioned above of the annual general meeting of the company to be held at the Eastside Rooms,

Woodcock St, Birmingham B7 4BL on Saturday 12 November 2022 at 3.30pm.

The full notice of the AGM will be sent to members by email one calendar month before the AGM with a full agenda. There will be changes proposed to NGA's articles of association at the AGM.

The AGM gives the board

the chance to tell the members what they have accomplished during the year and enables members to question the board about the way in which NGA is run. All members are welcome to attend both the conference and AGM. Booking details will be available at:

www.nga.org.uk/events

WELCOME TO GOVERNANCE LIVE - NEW DATES AVAILABLE

Welcome to Governance LIVE is our newest membership benefit available to NGA GOLD and MAT trustee members. Designed for new governors and trustees, the Welcome to Governance LIVE session will support you to make an impact in your first six months.

The sessions will explore:

- what you can expect (the positives and also examples of real-life challenges)
- top tips and the support available to you
- how to make an impact quickly (the type of school/trust you'd like it to be and how to support achieving its vision)

If you haven't received an email from us, you can book a place at www.nga.org.uk/Welcome-to-Governance-LIVE.aspx

Existing NGA members can also upgrade to GOLD membership to access these sessions.



THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAMME

is run by Family Action and funded by the Department for Education. It supports schools in England who have 40% or more children in IDACI bands A-F to provide pupils with a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day.

The National School Breakfast Programme will provide:

- Healthy food delivered to eligible schools until July 2023
- Schools will be asked to contribute just 25% towards the supply and delivery of breakfast food from September 2022 to July 2023
- A knowledgeable school support team on hand to provide remote advice and support
- Good practice sharing opportunities, resources and the opportunity to learn from a national network of schools
- The opportunity to enhance parental engagement on healthy eating

If you would like to join the programme or find out more, please visit nsbp.family-action.org.uk/s/expression-of-interest

AUTUMN TERM EVENTS OPEN FOR BOOKINGS

We have a fantastic autumn events schedule for you this term, with a range of forums, network events, conferences and webinars to keep you up to date with the latest information, advice and guidance.

16 September	Webinar: Recruiting and retaining governors and trustees	12.30-1.10pm
29 September	MAT Trustee Governance Leadership Forum	4.30-6.00pm
6 October	Local Academy Governance Leadership Forum	4.30-6.00pm
11 October	SAT Governance Leadership Forum	4.30-6.00pm
13 October	LA Maintained Governance Leadership Forum	4.30-6.00pm
20 October	Webinar: Safeguarding	12.30-1.00pm
1 November	MAT Governance Network	4.30-6.00pm
12 November	Annual Conference and AGM	9.30am-3.30pm AGM: 3.30-5.00pm
23 November	SEND Network	4.30-6.00pm
6 December	Governance Professional Network	10.00am-midday

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THREE NEW RESOURCES FOR NGA MEMBERS

There have been some important updates to statutory guidance and core governing responsibilities you need to be aware of for the start of term.

Safeguarding

Creating safe environments for children and young people is one of the most important duties for governing boards. A new version of the statutory guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education came into force on 1 September 2022. [See www.nga.org.uk/safeguarding-guidance](http://www.nga.org.uk/safeguarding-guidance)

Improving school attendance

Department for Education (DfE) Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance applies to all schools from September 2022. It shows

that governors and trustees should play an active role in improving attendance.

Find out more at www.nga.org.uk/pupil-attendance

Behaviour management

Effective behaviour management is fundamental to creating supportive, safe and inclusive learning environments. Our updated guide explains how boards and school leaders can collaborate to develop an effective behaviour policy. **Read more at: www.nga.org.uk/behaviour-management**

LOOK AFTER YOUR LEADERS FOR FREE

This autumn, why not help your school leaders to feel reinvigorated and energised in their role?

Education Support's School Leaders' Service is fully funded by the DfE and aims to improve leaders' wellbeing and give them the space to process the high-pressure situations they face daily.

Help your leaders to be as effective as possible and gain new strategies and perspectives that will benefit their whole school community.

Find out more: <https://bit.ly/3blrg53>

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Keeping children safe in education

With guidance updated, NGA information officer **Fariha Choudhury** explains what has changed for governing boards

Determining an organisation's approach to safeguarding never falls off a board's collective mind, and so a key resource that boards rely on is the statutory guidance, Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSiE).

The guidance has been updated and there are two key changes governing boards will want to pay attention to: a requirement for governor and trustee training, and conducting online searches on shortlisted candidates. A full list of the changes boards need to be aware of can be found in our updated guidance on our Knowledge Centre and Learning Link module.

Training your board

The updated version of KCSiE now requires all governors and trustees to receive appropriate safeguarding and child protection (including online) training at induction and for this to be regularly updated.

While there is little guidance on exactly what should be included, NGA has some advice on what this should look like in practice:

- be tailored to governance, distinct from that offered to school staff
- consider the specific context of your school/trust

- cover the board's relationship with the designated safeguarding lead
- ensure that governors and trustees understand the duties that schools/trusts have to safeguard and promote the welfare of children
- help explain what effective safeguarding monitoring looks like.

The lead safeguarding governor or trustee may need to receive different training to the rest of the governing board. We would advise that training be undertaken annually.

Online searches

A new addition to the guidance in relation to staff recruitment is that "schools should consider




**FARIHA
CHOUDHURY**
INFORMATION
OFFICER

carrying out an online search as part of their due diligence on the shortlisted candidates". The guidance does not provide further detail on how this would work in practice, although governing boards should take the following into account:

- searches should be confined to information that is 'publicly available'
- the search should be focused on identifying issues (such as inappropriate or offensive behaviour) that might make the candidate unsuitable to work with children or may cause reputational damage to the school or trust
- if concerning content is found, the school/trust may wish to explore this further with the candidate at interview
- to help avoid discrimination and bias, the individual(s) conducting this search should be unconnected to the recruitment process – using an external provider may help with this
- determining a suitable time frame of how far back to look – sector experts suggest five years.

School leaders will need to update policies and procedures for recruiting staff to reflect this new expectation. Governing boards should be aware of the need to conduct online searches when recruiting an executive leader.

As with many governing board duties, compliance should not be the sole focus, therefore safeguarding should be a consideration in everything the board does. A whole-school approach is key and so safeguarding should be embedded at every level within a school/trust – this starts with the governing board. 



Diversifying our boards – the conversation we must have

NGA director of advice and guidance **Steve Edmonds** explains the thinking behind a new practical resource helping boards take action to improve their diversity

There is now widespread acknowledgement of the benefits of encouraging people from all walks of life to volunteer and participate in the governance of our schools. NGA's 2021 Increasing Participation in School and Trust Governance report made the case that schools and trusts should bring different skills, perspectives and approaches together by drawing from different backgrounds and characteristics.

But acknowledgement will only take us so far. It's action that is needed to create real change, and data from our 2022 annual governance survey suggests there is still some way to go. The data indicates that, as the challenge of recruiting governors and trustees is increasing, our boards are at risk of becoming even less diverse. This can certainly be applied to people from Black, Asian or minority ethnic backgrounds and younger people (who we define as being under 40 years old) who remain significantly underrepresented.

We need to maintain serious conversations with our governing colleagues about how membership of the board identifies with pupils, parents and the wider community.



Last year we transformed our governance skills audit, providing the opportunity for those governing to evaluate their understanding of community context, as well as their capacity to promote an inclusive culture.

We have now published a new practical resource in the shape of a diversity indicators form. This can be used by boards to gather data and have meaningful conversations that may lead to:

- targeted recruitment to address gaps in experience and diversity
- developing and adapting board practices to take into account specific needs and circumstances, and ensure full participation
- prioritising training and awareness-raising in identified areas
- addressing potential 'blind spots' through seeking perspectives that might not come through the current membership of the board.



STEVE EDMONDS
DIRECTOR OF
ADVICE AND
GUIDANCE

This is not an attempt to standardise conversations about board diversity and ignore context, which we recognise is so important. The indicators of diversity included on the form are taken from the official census and added to using the feedback received from focus groups. They include age, ethnicity, disability and religion, life experience and experience of the schools' system, which is likely to shape an individual's perspective and contribution to governance.

We also acknowledge that having data is one thing – following through on the issues the data identifies is entirely another. Recruiting, retaining and supporting governors and trustees, alongside the competing demands of workload and compliance, can feel enough of a challenge in itself. However, the commitment we share to making equality, diversity and inclusion run through our schools and trusts makes it non-negotiable. The change we all want to see in governance will not be achieved if conversations about increasing diversity and participation are not part of our routines and self-evaluation. **ON**

 **More information**
<https://www.nga.org.uk/diversity-indicators>

Teachers' pay update



NGA director of advice and guidance **Steve Edmonds** provides an update on teachers' pay recommendations in 2022/23

The government's recent teacher salary announcement has been described as the 'worst of all worlds' – both damaging to the profession and unaffordable for schools. Starting in September, teacher starting salaries are to increase by 8.9% alongside a salary increase of 5% for teachers and leaders on the upper and leadership pay scales.

The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) that advises the government on teacher pay, recommended the increases in their 2022 report, published in July alongside the draft revised 2022 School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document (STPCD).

The increase mirrors what the government proposed to the STRB as part of its commitment to eventually raising the starting salary to £30,000 and making teaching more competitive. While the government proposed an increase of 3% to all other grades, the STRB said that an increase of 5% was necessary to address the risks to teacher supply.

NGA is also consultee to the STRB. We maintained that all

teachers should be entitled to a cost of living rise as a minimum and that the increase should be fully funded.

Despite the 5% increase for many teachers being an improvement on the increase proposed by the government, it still amounts to a pay cut in real terms because inflation is currently running at just below 12%. This also means that the commitment to raising the starting salary to £30,000 is now worth much less than when it was first made.

Pay is not the sole factor when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality teachers and leaders, but this announcement does little if anything to make recruitment and retention less of a challenge for boards and leaders. More teachers are leaving the profession within 10 years of starting and more schools are struggling to cover gaps with supply staff and non-subject specialists. This situation cannot continue.

The overall cost of the pay awards at school and trust level varies

depending on the profile of the teacher workforce. However, most will have modelled their budgets according to the increase the government proposed to the STRB and not the increase that the STRB deemed as necessary. Factor into the equation a rise in support staff pay, which is set separately, and increased costs such as energy bills, and the scope schools have to increase spending using additional funding is significantly reduced.

For boards facing up to this net pressure, the likelihood will be cuts to provision. NGA has called on the government to act and provide financial support to reduce the impact.

What governing boards need to do in the autumn term

Boards need to review their school or trust pay and appraisal policies annually to clarify their approach to making performance-based pay decisions and to set out the extent to which the national pay uplift is taken into account when making any individual pay decisions. Therefore, the publication of the final STPCD in September should prompt the board's annual review of its pay policy in the autumn term.


The full governing board must approve the policy and pay recommendations backdated to 1 September 2022. We recommend you seek the advice of your governance professional on how the policy review should be managed and give due regard to any local advice and consultation with unions. 

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Summer seminar

Addressing the impact of socioeconomic disadvantage on the attainment of pupils has long been a key focal point for schools. As a sector we are not short of experts on the matter and there are lots of evidence-based strategies for schools to choose from.

We also know that the issue is certainly on the radar of governing boards nationally according to the results of this year's annual governance survey. 'Ensuring pupil premium makes an impact' is high on the agenda for boards, with 29% of respondents pitching it as one of their top five strategic priorities, while the 'attainment of disadvantaged children' was considered by 31% to be in the top three challenges facing boards.

So why have we seen no movement in the closure of the gap since 2014? Of course, systemic issues surrounding finance and funding are a huge part of this, and we absolutely can't escape that not so small detail. But are there schools where disadvantaged pupils are thriving? And if so, what is it that they're doing differently?

In this year's summer seminars we heard from a panel of experts that addressed these questions and more. Let's take a look at the current landscape of disadvantage in our schools and reflect on some key takeaways for



Addressing disadvantage – from strategy to success



NGA's policy and projects manager **Fiona Fearon** reflects on lessons at a summer seminar on tackling the educational impact of disadvantage

governing boards in understanding their role in supporting disadvantaged pupils.

1 What does the current data tell us?

Nationally, about a quarter of pupils are at a disadvantage in their education as defined by the DfE's pupil premium eligibility measure. The academic attainment gap between these pupils and their peers is about 18 months by the time they take their GCSEs; about 40% of that gap is evident at age five. Nationally, efforts to close the gap have been largely fruitless, with no reduction since 2014. For children in 'persistent disadvantage', who account for 40% of the pupil premium population, the gap at GCSE is closer to two years and hasn't shifted over the past decade. These statistics vary regionally

too, with the gap wider than the average in high income deprivation affecting children index (IDACI) areas, and lower than the average in low IDACI areas.

2 The pandemic impact

The pandemic further exacerbated the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers. By the autumn term of 2021, the difference in learning loss was around 0.9 months in primary reading and 1.5 months in secondary

reading. For primary maths, the gap was about 0.5 months. These learning losses were in addition to the gap that already exists.

3 The wider scale of poverty

The pupil premium measure offers a limited view of the true scale of the number of pupils living in poverty. The poverty line set annually by the government considers any household earning less than 60% of the median UK income to be living in poverty. When looking at socioeconomic disadvantage in education through this lens, the picture is much more stark, with one in three (800,000) children living in poverty in England; that's nine pupils in a class of 30, many of whom will not be entitled to free school meals.

4 Understanding the context of

TOP TIPS: WHAT ARE SCHOOLS DOING WHERE DISADVANTAGED PUPILS ARE THRIVING?

Recognising that the responsibility of addressing disadvantage lies with the school, not the families.

There is a collective responsibility among staff in addressing disadvantage in their school. All staff understand how disadvantage affects pupils' learning, how their school is responding and their individual responsibility in that response.

Identifying and focusing on the controllable factors preventing disadvantaged children from thriving.

Developing strong relationships with families and drawing them into school, where they can find a sense of belonging.

“Schools are best placed to determine what disadvantage looks like in their communities”

your school is key

We most commonly link educational disadvantage to socioeconomic status. But schools are best placed to determine what disadvantage looks like in their communities. By identifying needs not labels through assessment, not assumptions, schools reduce the risk of creating a generalisation about pupils from less affluent backgrounds and isolating those pupils and families that are experiencing disadvantage that don't have the pupil premium label. Considering your own school context in relation to disadvantage will create opportunities for governing boards to set strategies with their school leaders that are meaningful, targeted and effective.

5 Pupil premium strategies: quality not quantity

Making informed and considered choices rooted in assessment of need should drive our approach to addressing disadvantage in our schools. In terms of how pupil premium is spent across the country, there is very little difference between where disadvantaged pupils are thriving and where disadvantaged pupils are struggling. Many schools take a 'supermarket sweep' approach to choosing interventions, selecting lots of strategies and hoping they work. However, what seems to have the most impact is when schools intentionally choose


evidence-based interventions that meet the assessed needs of their pupils and are implemented as part of a clear strategy.

6 Addressing the language gap

Addressing the language gap with evidence-informed strategies is fundamental in addressing the disadvantage gap. Equipping and empowering pupils in broadening their language skills will inevitably improve academic achievement and a sense of belonging in the classroom. By developing their language skills, pupils are able to communicate with their peers and teachers in a way that allows positive relationships to flourish, and evidence tells us that this has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. It is worth boards checking that addressing the language gap is a key part of their school's strategy in order to maximise opportunities for all of their pupils.

7 Parental engagement

Building trusting relationships with families is key to breaking down some barriers to learning. A key question governing boards can ask both of themselves and their school leaders is: "Is our school easy to access for the families of our pupils?" We often talk about 'hard to reach' families, but creating an environment where families feel a sense of belonging means there will be less need for reaching out and more opportunity for welcoming in. 🗨️

 **More information**
[www.nga.org.uk/
Complying-with-GDPR](http://www.nga.org.uk/Complying-with-GDPR)

Suspensions and exclusions



Rani Kaur, NGA head of advice, summarises the new statutory guidance on suspensions and exclusions, and what it means for governing boards



The DfE has released its updated statutory guidance on suspensions and permanent exclusions. The new guidance applies to any exclusion or suspension that occurs on or after 1 September 2022.

It is clear that suspensions and exclusions should be a last resort. Acting as a ‘companion piece’ to DfE’s Behaviour in Schools non-statutory guidance, it is a reminder that exclusion is part of a much bigger conversation – a school’s approach to behaviour can say a lot about its culture and values.

Although there are some changes that governing boards should be aware of, the law on exclusions is largely unchanged.

A key addition is the recognition that managed moves and off-site directions are essential behaviour management tools. Thus, there is

more detail on managed moves along with enhanced guidance on how they should be used.

Off-site direction has been clarified as a temporary measure that can be used as part of behaviour management strategies. This guidance, together with existing Alternative Provision statutory guidance should help to ensure that these measures are used and monitored effectively.


The governing board’s role in relation to oversight of suspensions and exclusions is also highlighted with an expectation that it provides effective challenge. In practice, this means using data to review suspensions and permanent exclusions, those taken off roll and those on roll but attending education off-site.

In doing so, they should carefully consider the number of pupil moves, suspensions

and exclusions, and look for any trends and possible solutions. For example, governing boards asking themselves whether their setting’s SEN support needs to be reviewed in light of high levels of movement among pupils with SEND.

Although it was possible for a headteacher to ‘withdraw’ an exclusion, there are now additional steps that must be taken for this to happen. The headteacher must notify the governing board and other parties without delay, allow the pupil back into school, offer parents the opportunity to meet with the headteacher, and report the number of decisions cancelled each term to the governing board.

Virtual school heads and social workers will become more involved. This will include being informed of the period of the suspension or permanent exclusion and the reason(s) for it, when the governing board meeting is taking place, and being allowed to attend, should they wish to do so, although there are still no provisions for virtual meetings.

Updated NGA exclusions resources reflect these changes and are designed to support governors/trustees who are part of an exclusion panel as well as governance professionals providing procedural support. NGA Learning Link subscribers can also complete a minimising exclusions e-learning module. 



You can read the latest guidance at www.nga.org.uk/exclusions

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OUR SURVEY SAYS...

School and trust governance in 2022

Increasing safeguarding concerns, a greater focus on the curriculum, the highest level of difficulty recruiting teaching staff since 2014, and the rise and rise of the local tier of MAT governance.

Nina Sharma looks at this year's NGA survey.

Now in its 12th year, the NGA's annual governance survey has revealed the emerging challenges schools and trusts have faced over the past year. Thank you to the 4,000-plus of you who told us what matters most in your school or trust, helping us to communicate those opinions and concerns directly to government, policymakers and beyond. The analysis is compared with findings from previous years, providing the only longitudinal account of the education system from a board's perspective.

Safeguarding

Creating safe environments for pupils is one of a governing board's most important duties. New updates to Keeping Children Safe in Education (see page 8), detailing new training requirements for boards, appear very timely: 71% of schools reported an increase in the number of safeguarding concerns following the pandemic. This is an alarming finding, and reflects wider concerns about the ongoing impact of the pandemic on pupil safety and wellbeing. Particular safeguarding concerns are emerging in relation to both domestic abuse/neglect and mental health.

External support and services

In 2021, more respondents cited pupil mental health and wellbeing as a top-three priority than anything else, so this year we wanted to know more. The impact of overwhelmed external services on supporting pupil mental health and wellbeing has continued to be a major concern for the majority of respondents. Three-quarters (76%) of you said improved access to specialist services would help your school further support pupil mental health and wellbeing, with 75% saying access to additional

funding would help. Meanwhile, the support schools can offer to families as part of a wider role in society continues to generate debate, but many are attempting to go above and beyond. Eight out of 10 respondents report that access to additional funding would help their board to further support families experiencing poverty with the top three services that schools provide to pupils and their families – second-hand uniform provision, wrap-around care and providing breakfast.

Staffing

The teaching recruitment crisis is a familiar issue for many, and was reported continually throughout the past year. The percentage of governing boards reporting that their school/trust had found it difficult to recruit teaching staff is at its highest since we first asked the question in 2014, increasing from 29% in 2021 to 51% this year.

Meanwhile, the top three factors in recruiting and retaining staff were workplace culture, CPD and professional growth, and managing workload and wellbeing. Staff wellbeing and workload feature as



NINA SHARMA
NGA SENIOR POLICY
AND INFORMATION
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both a top strategic priority (45%) for boards as well as one of the top three challenges (27%).

Finances

It will come as no surprise

that funding continues to present significant challenges to schools, particularly from a long-term perspective. Only 35% of you believe your organisation is sufficiently funded to deliver its vision and strategy to meet the needs of all pupils, down markedly from 40% in 2021. Two-thirds (65%) said they did not feel their school or trust receives enough funding to deliver their vision and strategy to meet all pupils' needs; this is an increase of five percentage points since the question was first asked last year (60%).

Governing board practice and recruitment

At NGA, we remain in awe of the hours given by volunteers to their schools and trusts – as serving trustees or governors ourselves, we know the commitment of time and energy you put in. It is encouraging to see that three-quarters of you say your governing role is manageable around other personal and professional commitments. But it is sobering that, among some age groups, the role appears less manageable. Those aged 18-59 years old were less likely to feel that their governance role is manageable alongside other commitments.

This perhaps isn't surprising, as many in this age group will be balancing working commitments and young families. But it does raise the issue of what boards can proactively do to make the role more manageable for all age groups and thereby benefit from the wealth of

NGA'S 2022 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE SURVEY SERIES

- 1 - Governance in multi academy trusts
- 2 - Governance volunteers and board practice
- 3 - Priorities, people and resources

You can read the full findings and published reports on the [NGA research page at nga.org.uk/research](https://nga.org.uk/research)



The three reports explore different angles of governing

deciding to join or form a trust has nearly doubled since 2020, the overall number of schools actively pursuing this remains small, with just 11% of SATs, federations and schools maintained by Local Authorities deciding to join MATs. Six in 10 (60%) have either considered it but decided against it (17%) or have not considered it at all (43%).

The evolution of local governance

While there have been mixed reports on the number of MATs that do and don't have local governance, NGA's longitudinal data reveals a significant commitment to local governance among trusts that is increasing over time. In 2022, 90% of respondents agreed that their trust board is committed to ongoing local governance arrangements – only 3% did not agree. An increased majority (91%) have arrangements for each school, compared with 84% in 2017. While local tiers have varying roles, monitoring pupil outcomes remains the most delegated function overall (95%), followed by engaging with stakeholders (93%), and then advocating for the school in the local community (84%).

MAT growth

The vast majority of MATs say they plan to grow in the coming year, but the factors influencing this continue to shift and differ. 'Economies of scale' as a factor has jumped to 58% in 2022 from just 30% in 2021; it is now second only to 'growth forming part of the trust strategy' (59%). This is perhaps unsurprising given another finding of this year's report – the strength of negative feeling on trusts being able to fund their long-term vision and strategy. It is also worth pointing out that, although not the biggest factor, more than half of MAT respondents (55%) listed reasons related to the white paper as one of their motivations for future MAT growth. ☺

diverse perspectives from different demographics.

While the pandemic enabled governing boards to take different approaches to meetings, from in-person meetings to full virtual meetings, many respondents expressed the value that in-person governing board meetings have.

Stakeholder engagement

Among many other things, the past few years have affected the ways in which governing boards are talking to and listening to stakeholders. As pupils made a more permanent return to school classrooms, the level of engagement that governing boards have with parents, pupils, staff and their local community has generally increased, and adaptations have been made to suit the new context of the post-pandemic world. Around 40% of governing boards have adapted their approaches to engaging with stakeholders to overcome the challenges of the pandemic.

MAT governance

The role of multi academy trusts (MATs) in education has been developing at a rapid pace during the past decade. This year has brought about a renewed and strengthened focus on the future of MATs, with the arrival of the long-awaited schools white paper, Opportunity for All. The survey also captured the views of MAT CEOs. As such, it provides a unique view of the realities of the system from those leading and governing MATs at a significant point in the history of these trusts.

The appetite for academisation

The white paper's recommendation for a fully trust-based system is certainly having some impact, but perhaps not as much as some might expect. The appetite for joining a trust is increasing, but at a subdued rate. Although the number of maintained schools and single academy trusts (SATs)

THE TOP STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNING BOARDS ARE:

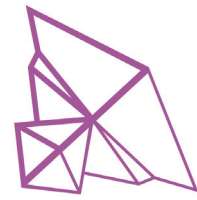
- Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum
- Improving attainment
- Support for pupils with special educational needs
- Pupil mental health and wellbeing
- Staff wellbeing, including workload

THE TOP THREE CHALLENGES FACING OUR SCHOOLS AND TRUSTS ARE:

- Balancing the budget
- The attainment of disadvantaged children
- Staff wellbeing, including workload

The Computing Quality Framework

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Computing
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"The CQF showcases the progress we've made in our computing department and helped us to review our aims and create plans to achieve our goals. As an NCCE Computing Hub, we're also looking forward to supporting other schools to achieve the Computing Quality Mark."

Sophie Barr, computer science teacher at Pate's Grammar School, Cheltenham

National Centre for Computing Education

Find out more at computingqualityframework.org

Local governors & MATs: a time and opportunity to rethink

David Brown, chief executive of Eynsham Partnership Academy and a trust chair in Birmingham, explains how celebrating the local tier works in one trust in Oxfordshire

Eynsham Partnership Academy (EPA) Trust had done some work in building up relationships with school local governing bodies, and both of our recent trust board chairs had been chairs of governors. Despite this, I think we all would agree that it has not been a dynamic part of the vision or direction of the MAT.

I joined as CEO just before COVID-19 and like other trusts, we were very active in ensuring our chairs of governors were in regular close Zoom contact as a group with myself and the trust board chair during this period. This was both for COVID-19 planning but also focused on our strategic goals. During this time the previous MAT three-year plan came to an

end and it became clear that no one really felt they had a connection to it – it had been a requirement rather than a driver of change.

We all know that values sit at the heart of great organisations, so we asked ourselves what that should actually mean for EPA. We already do good work on standards, safeguarding and so on with a vision statement probably similar to many others. So we became more interested in what role the MAT strategic plan plays for trustees, governors and the wider communities we serve.

Achieving as a partnership

We're a successful, growing trust, we don't need another layer of 'monitoring'. Schools have development plans, we are active in performance management and clear that heads and executive officers have very defined roles in fulfilling their statutory duties, raising standards and reporting on progress in these areas. The scheme of delegation is fine but hardly excites people.

We talked directly about what colleagues wanted the trust to be like in five years' time – what is it that we could achieve together as a

partnership and what is it we want to use this partnership for? This led us to a 'relatively' short statement about what we were going to be about for the next five years.

For governors and trustees, as well as school leaders, this led to asking: "What do we do to bring to life what adds value – which is deeper, broader and about longer-term success rather than just being another set of annual objectives?" Some key themes emerged:

- special needs is a huge area of concern especially post-COVID-19 – we are focusing on early intervention for KS1 pupils displaying challenging behaviour and support for their parents
- planning for sustainability, biodiversity and zero-carbon – to make it real
- greater intellectual challenge with a focus on science, mathematics and tech
- ensuring that disadvantaged





pupils and those who have fallen most behind during COVID-19 were catching up.

We were determined that this would be a whole-trust plan, not a board or senior officer plan. We needed to look for wider leadership and capacity to make it happen. What we think marks us out is the role of chairs of local governing bodies (LGBs) in leading this new trust approach.

The role of LGBs

LGB chairs lead most strategic groups and each has at least two senior leaders supporting them. Significantly we have used our governor, trustee and community connections to recruit external advisers/ambassadors who are focused on single issues. This has added significant capacity to our resources.

As we have grown, we have more standardisation in statutory systems and more

single procured contracts to generate efficiencies for schools. And where intervention has been needed, such as in the failing school that joined us in 2020, we have taken decisive action to turn them around.

This July 2022 EPA's primary SATs combined score rose compared with 2019 while they fell 6% nationally so we're now 12% above national. Standards are rising and the disadvantaged gap closing. But we need the strategic plan to go further still and relate this in part to having the best people in our voluntary governance roles. We want their skills and experience, the added capacity and sometimes their influence and networks – they want to make a difference.

OUR LOCAL CHAIRS IN ACTION

JENNY FAULKNER IS CHAIR OF HEYFORD PARK SCHOOL AND STANTON HARCOURT PRIMARY

Jenny chairs the Trust Advisory Panel on Intellectual Challenge (Science) which has begun to coordinate work on our Years 5-8 Curriculum as well as wider work on chemistry, Mandarin, future careers and related projects.

LUCY DICKINSON IS CHAIR OF BARTHOLOMEW SCHOOL

Lucy chairs the Trust Advisory Panel on Climate & Bio-Diversity. This group links to the community as well as schools and has already been successful in attracting Natural England funding, led a Youth Summit and featured in Governing Matters March 2022.

HILARY EMERY CBE IS CHAIR OF EYNHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Hilary chairs the Trust Advisory Board for our Early Intervention Hub for all primaries. This has had considerable success, attracted two-year pilot funding from Oxfordshire CC, support from Family Links and has a board of many experts from related fields and backgrounds. This board was one of the key reasons why we achieved the pilot funding.

Next year we are ready to develop a more radical and cross-phase approach to reading support and already have another chair of governors who will lead this for us. **Lindsay Nadin:** "The support of the trust and a strong relationship with key trust leaders has been central to our school's improvement journey. I look forward to leading a new trust theme to drive even more progression in reading."

None of this should impede good governance where our 'normal' activity is focused. The trust is able to intervene where necessary but on the basis of a much stronger relationship and shared perspective with key school governors. We value the autonomy of our schools, their leaders and governors, who have a strong commitment to their school community while being part of a larger trust – that's not an issue for us, it's an opportunity. 🍌


 Summer seminar

The gathering storm

Your leader needs you

NGA senior public relations officer **Ciarán Scott** summarises the challenges facing school leaders

The challenges school leaders have faced over the last few years are stark; these were explored in the second of NGA's summer seminars – The Leadership Challenge.

1 **Loyal leadership**

The loyalty and tenacity of senior leaders has been widely praised by governors and trustees for the way they weathered the storm during COVID. Various sources indicate that the majority of leaders wished to stay at their school to lead the charge and steer their communities and schools through the turmoil. However, now the immediate impact of the virus has begun to dissipate, although of

course not entirely, there is a growing speculation that more leaders are looking to leave the profession.

Schools Week recently reported the proportion of senior school leaders considering leaving their jobs has leapt by over 50% in just one year, reversing a downward trend seen during the pandemic, and leading to an almost 85% increase in vacancies for some school leaders compared with pre-COVID rates.

2 **Factors fanning the crisis**

Clearly 'COVID burnout' is a major factor, but not the only one. The Education Policy Institute had highlighted just the week before data from the School Workforce in England 2021 that showed two trends evident for the past decade: a growing number of headteachers resigning before pension age; and secondary heads leaving



CIARÁN SCOTT
SENIOR PUBLIC
RELATIONS
OFFICER

the profession at a greater rate than primary heads. One in four primary heads and one in three secondary heads under 50 years old who were new in post in 2015 had left headship by 2020.

Using data from Teacher Tapp, James Pope from Heads Up for Headteachers confirmed that, although problems are not exclusively down to the pandemic, it had clearly added pressure: pre-pandemic, 14% of senior leaders – around 3,000 – had already identified that they were working with undue stress and anxiety beyond their ability to cope, but during the pandemic this spiked to 48%.

Those leading schools had to concern themselves with the welfare of their pupils, their staff and the families they serve, which had compounded the more long-term systemic factors such as accountability pressures, competition among



schools, funding and pay restraint. These have now been added to by the cost of living crisis affecting school expenditure, and family poverty.

3 The accountability culture

All the panel accepted the need for accountability of leaders, and there was a real desire amongst governors and trustees to act to reduce the culture of fear. But there was also a realism that this was really hard to shift.

“I’d love for us to be more mindful of workload and strategic with priorities and say ‘We’re not focusing on that just yet’, but we’d been a school requiring improvement for a while; that fear of Ofsted and having to get everything right, right now, is real and lasting. Now we’re ‘good’ but it’ll take a while to change the culture. The development plan is still 40 pages long.”

A chair at the summer seminar

4 A fantastic role

Despite all the challenges, James Bowen, policy director at the National Association of Headteachers, had a clear message that school leadership remains a fantastic and rewarding role. There was a call for boards to be a constant reminder to school leaders of the difference they

make: it is easy for them to lose sight of the impact they are having when besieged by problems to solve.

“My head was new in February although he had been deputy during most of the pandemic. He is doing really well, feels supported by his mentor and his wellbeing and workload is on my fortnightly list of questions. He’s loving having discussions about curriculum and all the things that were left behind during the pandemic.”

A chair at the summer seminar

5 Leadership wellbeing

The grim statistics on senior leader wellbeing reinforced the need for boards to look out for them. NGA has developed a range of practical guidance, including a wellbeing evaluation tool created with Schools Advisory Service that focuses on the wellbeing of school leaders, their self-care, as well as how wellbeing is modelled throughout the school/trust.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/wellbeing-tool

6 Mindful boards

There has also been lots of praise for the level of support boards have provided, and the message is to continue doing what you are doing. Mindful boards help create the conditions for more sustainable approaches to workload and promote opportunities for peer-to-peer support.

“Governors try to balance all this gloom and provide strong support for school leaders.”
“We have established peer-to-peer support networks for all our headteachers to access.”

There was also discussion of the positive difference flexible working can make to wellbeing and retention.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/flexible-working

7 Responding to the leadership challenge

Emma Knights, NGA chief executive, said this issue is at the heart of good governance, as retaining good leaders enables pupils to have the education they deserve. We will definitely continue the debate about the role the chairs themselves play. While panellists urged governors and trustees to recognise that headteachers need to receive support from others who do not also hold responsibility for the accountability agenda, we don’t want the support provided week by week by chairs to go unnoticed or be undervalued.

“It is possible to ‘go out for lunch’ to have a more open and confidential conversation as chair of governors. This all depends on the relationship and over how many years.”
“I’ve been privileged to work with many school leaders over the years and found that not having a teaching background and being conditioned by that, has helped us to connect better and get under the skin of issues and feelings.”

There is also the issue of what works best, which probably differs from leader to leader. We would be delighted to hear how governing boards are supporting their senior leaders. Email ciaran.scott@nga.org.uk with your story. 

Momentum for reform continues

Michael Barton, NGA senior advice officer, gives an update on the government's education reforms and likely impact on governance

Despite the recent political turmoil, the government's education reforms have continued to gain momentum. March's white paper set out the government's direction of reform, which is advancing through a series of consultations, a regulatory review designed to support the fully academised system envisaged for 2030, and, the most significant piece of education legislation since 2010, the Schools Bill.

We expect these reforms to move forward in the autumn, with a 'sector conversation' on local governance in trusts among the many developments. The regulatory review revealed in the white paper was delayed and only started in late June.

The white paper

On the general direction of

the white paper, the past few months have enabled us to take a valuable temperature check on how it has altered thinking. Through channels including NGA's governance leadership forums, the so-called evidenced case for a trust-based system has been challenged as "not being persuasive" enough, certainly not as persuasive as the Department for Education hoped it would be.

However, as reported on page 16, our annual survey results do show that the positioning of the white paper, and the trajectory of growth for MATs, is having some impact, with over half of MAT respondents listing reasons related to the white paper as one of their motivations for growth.

The workings of 'mixed MATs' has been another frequent topic of discussion since the white paper was



MICHAEL BARTON
SENIOR ADVICE
OFFICER

published. Schools designated with a religious character have a different process for joining or forming an MAT. This has proved to be a significant barrier for some, with each diocese having its own distinctive approach, requirements and preferences.

The governing body of a foundation or voluntary school that has a foundation can only apply to become part of a trust with the consent of the trustees of the school and the person(s) by whom the foundation governors are appointed. Some dioceses and other religious authorities will only give consent if certain governance or other conditions are met. We heard several accounts of church schools looking to join an MAT but being limited to either a diocese-based MAT or MATs that are willing to change their membership at member

and trust level to accommodate church representation.

The Schools Bill

It's fair to say it's not been plain sailing for the Schools Bill. It had a rocky journey in consideration, facing widespread criticism from both Conservative and Labour peers in the House of Lords. The Bill is expected to complete its time in the Lords in September, before being passed on to the House of Commons for consideration around spring 2023. It was, however, stripped of its first 18 clauses after staunch opposition to the proposed academy trust standards. These standards will now be considered by the regulatory review and are expected to be reintroduced to the Bill in some form in the Commons.

NGA's input to the debate was highlighted when Baroness Blower, in Amendment 60, said: "I am very grateful to the National Governance Association for all the work that it has done on this... the governing body should both provide the link to the community and be the voice of the community".

NGA is also deeply concerned about clause 29 of the Bill. The clause will give local authorities and dioceses the power to override the wishes of the governing boards of maintained schools and request an academy order for their schools. Our view is that governing boards are best placed to decide what is in the interests of their school, and we will continue to make representations to this effect.

NGA has not been silent. As usual, we continue to engage with key individuals from all sides of the political spectrum to ensure that they are hearing

what you – our members – are telling us.

Regulatory review

The government hopes its regulatory review will report at the end of September, followed by a consultation on its recommendations. It will cover a range of issues, including trust standards and what proportionate intervention would involve when trusts fail to meet them. The review will also consider how decisions are made about when and where new trusts can be established, alongside how trust growth will be encouraged. Those making these proposals are CEOs, chairs and representatives from sector bodies.

Our view is that governing boards are best placed to decide what is in the interests of their school

As part of NGA's efforts to ensure our members' voices are heard during this process, we were pleased to welcome DfE representatives to our July MATs Network. The DfE listened to the perspectives from delegates on the various matters covered in the review and were very grateful for your feedback. This followed the DfE's attendance at our leadership forums earlier in the summer; they were again happy to hear views from those governing on the wider vision set out in the white paper.

The feedback received during these sessions can be broken down into three areas:

1 Role of regulation: Despite widespread reports that many within the sector are concerned

about a supposed 'power grab' that a disproportionate amount of regulation might represent, it was interesting that the MAT network itself revealed no real universal consensus from MAT trustees. There were, however, some lingering concerns, including worries that the DfE might end up undermining the role of the board of trustees.

2 Commissioning: It was highlighted that smaller trusts feel they do not always get fair opportunities to grow compared with larger trusts. NGA has heard this numerous times and from numerous places. It was also underlined that there is a strong demand for increased transparency on how decisions are taken in relation to trust growth.

3 Strategic governance: There was universal agreement on the need for strong strategic governance, but importantly not all trusts want the same central approach. Some want more clarity on the governance role in MATs while others seek assurances on flexibility and the freedom to run the structure in the way that best suits the trust.

We are always keen to hear from our members about issues raised in the white paper and welcome your comments on the Schools Bill itself and the regulatory review. By contacting us, you ensure NGA continues to reflect accurately the views of those governing and allows us to put your responses to the DfE and other stakeholders about these significant reforms. Over the summer, we launched a survey on the biggest issues raised by the white paper, so if you have any thoughts or experiences you want to share, please email me at michael.barton@nga.org.uk. 


 Summer seminar

Pupil wellbeing at the heart of governance

Despite a worsening crisis of children and young people's mental health, boards still have the power to make a difference, says NGA's **Elizabeth Collin**

As governors and trustees, the wellbeing of our pupils is our single most important goal. We volunteer our time to ensure our schools and trusts help them to succeed, to ensure they are healthy, happy and equipped to live fulfilling lives.

But this is an ever-increasing challenge. Concern around wellbeing and the mental health of pupils has been growing for some time, but as we and our nation's children live through a series of crises, it has come into sharper focus for us all.

A worsening crisis

The past two years have accelerated already rising mental health issues among children and young people, with now one in six with a probable mental health

disorder, up from one in nine in 2017.

Anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicidal ideation are the most common issues the charity Young Minds sees among children and young people. These issues are becoming more prevalent and more complex, particularly since the start of the pandemic.

Exacerbating the crisis is that rising demand is outstripping capacity of mental health services, despite record investment. Nearly 100,000 children and young people were referred to mental health services in March 2022, a record high, but Deirdre Kehoe from Young Minds explained that even before the pandemic, only 25% of young people referred to child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)

managed to access support.

The 2022 annual governance survey found that improved access to specialist services was the action most needed by governing boards to support their pupils' wellbeing. Attendees at the seminar echoed that, saying "external support is fundamentally lacking" due to a combination of a lack of capacity, lengthy wait times and rising thresholds.

A whole-school or whole-trust approach

So, what can we do? The biggest opportunity for schools and trusts to try to stem the rising tide of mental health issues is to focus on prevention and early intervention through a 'whole-school approach'.

There are many different frameworks, steps or programmes being used to do this: Public Health England's eight principles of promoting mental health and wellbeing,



and Well Schools' Steps to Success to name just two. The Department for Education (DfE) is also providing grants to train a strategic lead to implement the approach.

"Tap into that grant to access the senior mental health leads to take that strategic approach you need, to build the capacity needed," advises Marina Smith of Place2Be.

Every whole-school approach has one fundamental idea: that wellbeing is at the heart of everything the school or trust does. Going beyond just what is taught in the classroom, it puts wellbeing of the whole-school/trust community as the goal and lever to achieve all other ambitions.

Board-level champions

A common theme across every framework is the need for support and championing from senior leadership and board level. Governing boards are best placed to embed a culture that promotes wellbeing through inclusion, resilience and removes stigma around mental health.

As Deirdre Kehoe says: "The commitment to wellbeing and mental health support must be at SLT and governing board level. Put it on the agenda, keep it on the agenda."

We can also make it a strategic priority, ensuring there are the capacity and resources to meet the objectives and, crucially, to lead by example, considering the wellbeing implications for pupils, staff and the board itself in all our decision-making.

Simone Bayes of the DfE explains: "For wellbeing and mental health to be a core part of the culture means that whatever is being discussed by the board, a question

about the relevance to wellbeing and mental health is probably relevant."

This also means challenging how interventions, approaches and support can be most effective. There is no shortage of enthusiasm and an overwhelming number of ideas, resources and initiatives to use. But we need to challenge how the interventions meet the specific needs of our pupils.

"Really challenge why you're doing the things for wellbeing," says Kay Batkin of Well Schools. "Understand the reason why you're putting that intervention in or support in and address the issues."

"By monitoring wellbeing, we can understand the impact we are having, pinpoint interventions needed and identify children who may be struggling"

The power of informal support

We shouldn't expect teachers and support staff to take on the roles of mental health professionals, but school staff are often the first to identify or be confided in when young people are struggling.

"It's the core skills that many school staff have of listening well, setting boundaries and following through on what you said you were going to do that makes the biggest difference," says Deirdre Kehoe. "It gives young people an anchor, someone they feel is in their corner."

For boards, it's our role to ensure our staff have the capacity, the access to additional training and support for our own wellbeing to be able to act in this way. This helps

foster a listening culture where pupils and staff feel confident to speak up and reach out.

Measure what you treasure


Crucially, to understand the needs of our pupils and what is working, we need to, as vice chair of Well Schools and school governor Adrian Bethune explained, "measure what you treasure".

A quote attributed to the wellbeing expert Lord Richard Layard, this is something we as governors and trustees are well versed in doing, but NGA's 2022 annual survey found that only around half of boards monitored whole-school data on pupil wellbeing.

By measuring and monitoring wellbeing, we can establish a baseline of the current situation, understand the impact we are having, pinpoint differences and interventions needed for different groups and identify children who may be struggling.

"Work out what's working and celebrate those successes," says Adrian Bethune. "Start with a success-based approach, work out what's not working for your pupils and staff."

A priority for us all

We as boards cannot do everything to solve the crisis. We know fundamentally more needs to be done to ensure our mental health services have the capacity they need and reduce the burden on schools – but we can ensure our schools put wellbeing at the heart of what we do and provide a vital support system for our pupils. 



Elizabeth Collin is a senior public relations officer at NGA, and governor at a primary school in Birmingham.

Go outdoors

NGA policy and research officer **Megan Tate** explores how getting out into nature is an effective and efficient way to learn about the environment

Being omnipresent is hard to ignore – this has very much been our tactic for getting our Greener Governance campaign firmly on the agenda. Yet throughout, we've heard of financial constraints hampering green initiatives.

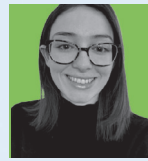
One accessible step towards going green is outdoor learning. While it might make you think of forest school or geography excursions, simply getting outside in campus grounds is part of the going green story. There are many benefits outdoor learning offer, and questions governors and trustees can ask to ensure it is happening.

The Institute for Outdoor Learning's definition is "an umbrella term for actively inclusive facilitated approaches

that predominantly use activities and experiences in the outdoors, which lead to learning, increased health and wellbeing, and environmental awareness". Outdoor learning spans across the four Cs of sustainability (campus, curriculum, culture and community) and is a good way to develop environmental sustainability in your school/trust. As a starting point, below are four questions from NGA's environmental sustainability that guidance boards can ask.

Culture

Does our promotion of physical and mental health of pupils and staff encourage being outdoors? COVID-19 has spotlighted staff and pupil mental wellbeing and, as boards,



MEGAN TATE
POLICY AND
RESEARCH
OFFICER

you can advocate for setting a whole-school culture that is inclusive and supportive of this. Outdoor learning is proven to be an effective way of embodying these values. In 2016, a Natural England report on learning outside in natural environments found that across 125 schools 72% of staff and 92% of pupils felt it had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing. A whole-school approach to environmental sustainability blends with other strategic priorities your board may have – keeping this reflection in mind will positively benefit your school/trust.

Campus

How do we use outdoor space? Do we seek to increase biodiversity? For example, rewilding areas of grass or creating habitats for insects/animals?

Our annual governance survey 2022 found that 47% of nurseries and 42% of primaries are currently offering some form of outdoor learning, compared with just 23% of secondaries. Misconceptions around the benefits of outdoor learning may play a part in



WHERE NEXT FOR GREENER GOVERNANCE?

The new academic year will continue to bring new Greener Governance ideas and best practice, so keep an eye on our campaign page. Don't forget to let us know if you sign up to the Greener Governance pledge, and get in contact with megan.tate@nga.org.uk with any ideas and suggestions.

reducing the uptake in later school years. The Centre for Education and Youth report highlighted robust evidence linking non-formal learning to improved educational outcomes, employment prospects, and physical and mental health.

Community

How and when do children experience their local outdoor environments? Could we work with the local community on this?

Again our annual governance survey revealed 70% of respondents listing resource (staff time and capacity) as the top factor that would support their organisation to take more action on environmental sustainability. Yet only 17% were utilising their community to do so. Community can be a large, often forgotten, resource of people with experience, passion and time that can ease resource pressures on schools.

Supporting urban schools, for example, is the Natural History Museum, as Lauren Hyams, head of urban nature activities, explains: "We're challenging students across the UK to help everyone better understand the nature around us, in our towns and cities. The Explore: Urban Nature programme is coming to a museum near you and there are lots of ways students aged 9 to 14 can be part of the urban nature movement. It's free to


take part and your students can help lead the way tracking and monitoring the nature closest to home, becoming the local experts, helping us observe and collect new data, and take action through science to make a real difference."

Curriculum

Do you offer the chance for children to learn outdoors, for example through visits or residential trips?

With the cost of living increasing rapidly,

trips and visits may be at the bottom of the agenda. But many organisations can support pupils to experience the outdoors. Through their Generation Green project for example, the Youth Hostel Association aims to connect all young people to nature by offering a range of funded day visits and longer residential.

A study carried out in 2015 by University College London found that "almost all outdoor learning interventions had a positive effect" especially that of longer activities like residential. 



LEADING THE CHANGE

NGA hosted a panel discussion with Jonathan Dewsbury, the senior responsible owner for sustainability and climate change at the Department for Education (DfE); Alex Green from Let's Go Zero; and professor of meteorology at the University of Reading and chair of governors Andrew Charlton-Perez. Some key discussion points included:

1. A whole-school approach. The need for a school/trust-wide commitment to environmental sustainability was established that includes action on all of the four Cs of campus, curriculum, culture and community.

2. Continual engagement with the education sector.

Following the new strategy for education, the DfE will continue to consult on the implementation of this including with governors and trustees.

3. Utilise the curriculum. Improving knowledge at all levels of school can help to progress action and the curriculum plays a vital role. The University of Reading's national climate education action plan includes Climate Ambassadors, a new initiative to mobilise climate experts to engage with young people and educators.

4. Use your influence. The Let's Go Zero

campaign supports schools to reach zero carbon by 2030 and shows the DfE that schools want change in this area. Governors and trustees are encouraged to lead the change.

5. Start now. Boards should start wherever they can, no matter how small. Funding will mainly come through local authorities, the BEIS or other external grants. For more information and resources see our Greener Governance campaign page.

You can watch the seminar on our website.

Autumn 2022 Trustees Programme

Lead and support your governing board to have real impact on your school's improvement.

Development *for* Chairs – Autumn Trustees 2022

Start date: 13 September 2022

Cost per participant: £249



This programme is a trustee-specific cohort and is designed to help you make lasting improvements to your trust board – from improving leadership skills, to developing both knowledge and confidence. You will have access to an ever-growing bank of useful resources, peer-to-peer support and networking. You can also tailor your learning by purchasing add-ons including mentoring or a 360 degree appraisal.

The programme includes three virtual face-to-face workshops and will take approximately two terms to complete.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/leadinggovernance to make your booking.

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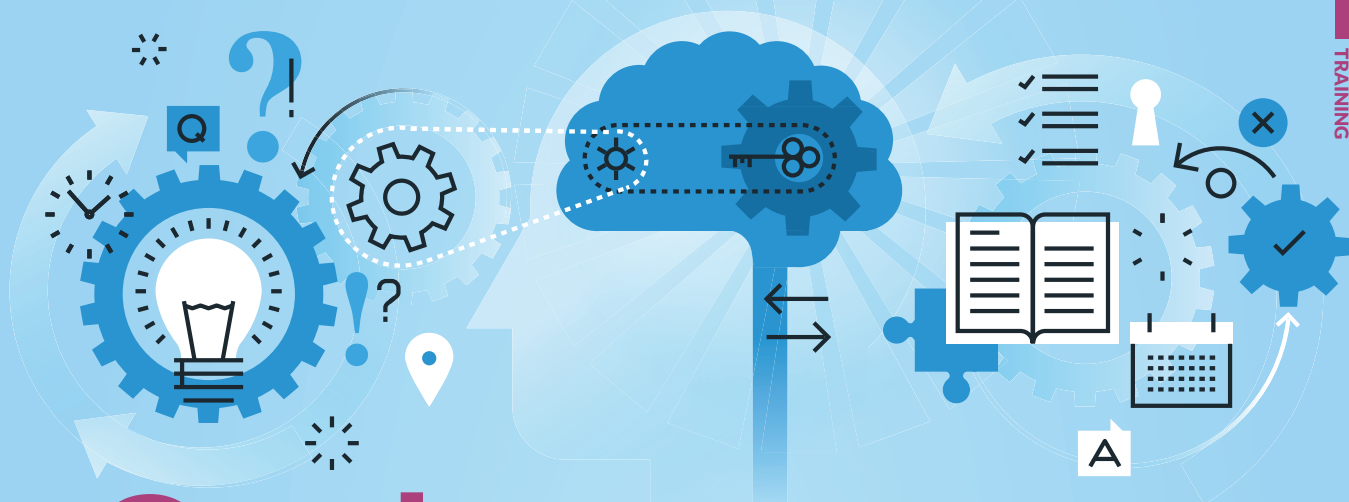
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Good governance – the how, not the what

Clare Collins, NGA head of consultancy, looks at the evolution of governance development and training post-pandemic

The challenge for anyone delivering governance development and training is how to make it real and practical – going beyond the ‘what needs to be done’ to ‘how to do it’. This was brought into even sharper focus during the pandemic when we had to work out how to support more effective governance without the luxury of meeting in person.

What at first looked like it would make work more difficult has led to governance training and development stepping up a gear. The result? An expanded professional development offer with in-person and online options. For example, we recommend that facilitated awayday events looking at creating a new vision and strategy are in person. On the other hand, roles and responsibilities training is equally well delivered using online platforms, with interaction through polls and breakout rooms generating discussion.

Another area where a really practical approach is appreciated is panel work. By its very nature, panel work is not routine and many governors and trustees go through their whole term of office without sitting on a panel. This means that if and when the need for a panel arises, organising training can be problematic. Having access to the suite of Learning Link modules which cover all kinds of panels (admissions, complaints, HR, exclusion) means that the background knowledge and information needed is immediately available, and the menu of supporting resources which accompanies all the e-learning modules can be downloaded for reference during the hearing.

But even this level of detail cannot prepare a panel for the actual experience and so we also offer a face-to-face session which walks you through a hearing – from who sits where, dealing with upsets and how to manage the actual process of listening to evidence in what can be a highly charged situation.

Many of our readers will be aware of NGA’s focus on governance culture and how board behaviours and relationships will determine the organisation’s culture. Sessions that explore board dynamics and meeting behaviours go beyond the business of what



CLARE COLLINS
NGA HEAD OF
CONSULTANCY

needs to be on the agenda to how the board operates around the table and the way in which it reaches decisions.

Increasingly, our external reviews aim to observe a board meeting and consultants will be watching body language, timing how long people speak for, how quieter or newer members are brought into discussions, and ultimately, how decisions are reached. Where there are issues, sensitive feedback and practical recommendations for developing a healthy culture will be offered.

The professional development team is always looking to support boards (see nga.org.uk/training for our range of services) but we are also here to learn. It is rare that we only share what we already know – working with boards usually results in us finding out more about how to ‘do’ governance and which we then add to our sessions with the aim of demystifying the theory and making it practical. 

Hi-vis governance

Sell the sizzle, not the sausage.

Communications expert **Anna Pedroza** on how describing the benefits of governance will help recruit a diverse and effective board

NGA's Visible Governance campaign has been busy of late, with a new short film launched, alongside a new survey that lays bare the current challenges of recruitment.

Findings from NGA's 2022 annual governance survey suggest schools and trusts are facing considerable challenges recruiting new governors, and vacancies are at their highest since 2016. Overall, 67% reported at least one vacancy and 38% reported two or more.

The pandemic has made recruitment more challenging, with two-thirds of respondents (63%) facing issues, compared with 55% in 2019.

This means recruitment remains an ongoing issue that needs constant attention from school leaders and chairs.

David Brown, chief executive of the Eynsham Partnership Academy Trust, explains its approach: "As a trust we try to think more about what might motivate someone to govern, and how it connects with their interests and passions, rather than feeling rushed to recruit. It certainly requires some creative thinking and we're constantly looking for people who could take on governance roles, and to also ensure we have the right mix of talents to be effective."

Balancing experience and youth

The research found that the number of governors and trustees under 40 was just 6% – the lowest on record since 2015. Half of governors and trustees are over 60 (51%) but just 1%

are under 30. Schools and trusts benefit hugely from the experience of older governors and trustees, but without younger volunteers also joining boards, they are missing the input of those who have recently experienced school.

Anju Dhir, who became a school governor in her mid-30s, believes governors need to be more visible to young people: "There are more governors 80 years and over than under 30. The issue is that young people simply don't know what we do – or that we even exist. This is a huge waste of human capital, for both schools and our young people."

Anju, who is a culture change manager at Birmingham City Council, regularly visits secondary schools and colleges in the West Midlands to speak at their careers events and always talks about governance as a valuable contribution to a school leaver or graduate's career: "Becoming a governor is an incredible way to develop your career and can start from as young as 18 – how many

young people normally get to join the board? For governing boards, having someone who has recently experienced our education system is invaluable.”

The research also shows just 6% of governors and trustees are Black, Asian or minority ethnic volunteers, compared with 94% who are White. While the figures are an important reminder that representation on boards remains stubbornly low, there was some good news. More boards are now focusing on this proactively, and there was a small increase in boards reporting that they are successfully recruiting members from underrepresented groups – 24% in 2022 compared with 16% in 2021.

Learning from the marketeers

Helping to solve the recruitment challenges needs us all to think more like marketeers. The big brands, who spend millions on marketing, sell the ‘sizzle’ rather than the sausage. So, in governance, we need to talk more about the positive impact on pupils and staff (and the benefits to ourselves), and less about descriptions of board responsibilities.

We must also not grow tired of telling people about governance. In marketing, it’s only after a prospective customer has heard about a product three times that marketeers expect them to even consider purchasing – it’s the same for governance. One chat with a friend, a post on social media or a talk are essential, but we can’t let up the pressure if we’re serious about reducing the vacancy gap.

Spreading the word

The #VisibleGovernance campaign is vital for helping to


“For governing boards, having someone who has recently experienced our education system is invaluable”

promote governance and has lots of ideas for how to spread the word, including these six simple tips:

- share the NGA’s new film *The Role of School Governors and Trustees* with friends, colleagues and relatives, to help them understand more about the role. Encourage them to sign up to a governor recruitment service.
- share why you are proud to be a school governor or trustee via social media. Use the downloadable social media graphics and the #VisibleGovernance hashtag to help your messages to stand out.
- if you work in a role where you are employed, speak to your manager about your school governance role and the skills it has helped you to develop. Is there an opportunity where you can speak to work colleagues about your role?

- if you are involved with local community groups, volunteer in other roles, are a member of a professional body, or have links to other networks, can you seek out opportunities to talk, or write, about school governance?

- ensure the school or trust website has up-to-date information about the governing board and explains the role of the board. Feature the new NGA film on the website alongside a clear call to action for anyone who wants to find out more about governance.
- talk about being a governor or trustee when people ask you about your interests, or what you do.

The Visible Governance campaign is about ensuring school and trust governance is recognised and celebrated for the positive role it plays in ensuring pupils and staff can flourish. So often, committed governance volunteers carry out their role without a song or a dance but, to meet the recruitment challenges, we need to be more vocal and more visible. 

CHECK OUT OUR NEW FILM

The NGA’s Visible Governance campaign aims to make governance more prominent in society, and has generated considerable interest despite being paused during the pandemic. The campaign is supported by leading education organisations and the hashtag #VisibleGovernance is now used widely by governors, trustees and wider educators when talking about governance.

To support the ongoing campaign, the NGA has launched a new film which, in less than two minutes, helps to demystify governance and encourage viewers to find out more about how they can help the schools in their community. *The Role of School Governors and Trustees* uses eye-catching animation to describe simply what governance volunteers do and is designed to have broad appeal. You can watch the animation at: www.nga.org.uk/visible-governance

Once again as we head into the autumn term, the NGA board is seeking new trustees. This year we will be seeking colleagues from the North East, and Yorkshire and Humber regions. It continues to be a huge honour to be a member of the board. Together, and working alongside NGA's chief executive and senior leaders, trustees help to steer our organisation in setting aims and objectives designed to seek ever stronger governance in our schools and trusts. The board is immensely proud to support our organisation as it in turn supports and enables us, its members, to meet the high standards that we must set ourselves in order to ensure better life chances for children and young people.

While it is a huge honour, joining the board is also a commitment – similar to the commitment required when joining a school or trust board. Trustees are elected for a period of four years and the annual cycle of work incorporates:

- four face-to-face board meetings at NGA's head office in Birmingham. These are held in person as it helps to make for better discussions, ensures we are visible to staff and enables us to build strong relationships,

Join us to make a difference

Lynn Howard, NGA chair of trustees, invites you to consider using your skills to help improve life chances for children as an NGA trustee

both with other trustees, and between trustees and staff

- an annual strategy day, again in Birmingham, where we come together with the NGA senior leadership team to plan the strategy for the next three years
- two virtual strategy and risk meetings. These differ from our board meetings in that they are less structured, therefore allowing space for generative governance. During these meetings we share our thoughts and ideas on wider issues that affect our organisation
- an annual board development day, again in Birmingham, during which we concentrate on our own training and development to ensure we keep




LYNN HOWARD
CHAIR OF TRUSTEES

up with changes to charity governance and to ensure we maintain the skills we need to be effective leaders of NGA

- in addition, working parties and the appointment of link trustees as needed to progress the business of the board in a timely fashion.

Our work is varied and exciting. It not only comprises the appropriate scrutiny and support that you would expect, but it also involves a good level of forward thinking, planning, sharing and generating ideas for that which we are all so passionate about – governance that is strong, visible and ethical – and we get to do that at the national level.

If you govern in either the North West or Yorkshire and Humber, I would encourage you to think about joining us, or alternatively to nominate someone you feel has something to add to our board.

As has become our usual practice, I will be hosting a virtual information session on 28 September at 6pm. Please join me and others from the board to find out more and ask any questions you may have. I very much look forward to seeing you then. If you have any queries, please contact our clerk Lara Angell by emailing lara.angell@nga.org.uk. 



The Chair's Handbook

A guide for chairs of governing boards
of schools and academy trusts

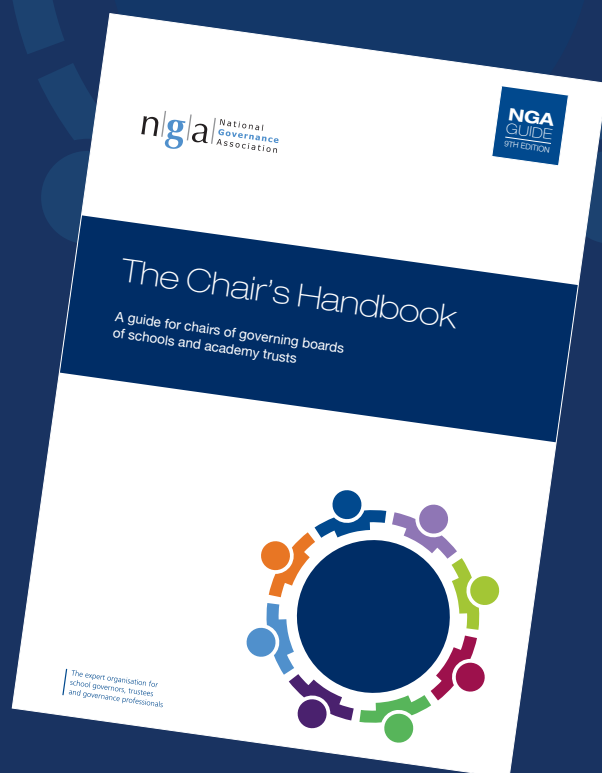
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