

Governing Matters

Spring 2024 | nga.org.uk



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Fostering expertise and
growth with the Teacher
Development Trust

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MAKE THEIR VOICES HEARD

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POLICY APPROVAL
THREE STEPS TO
POLICY HEAVEN

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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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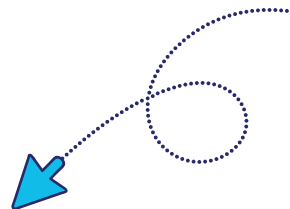
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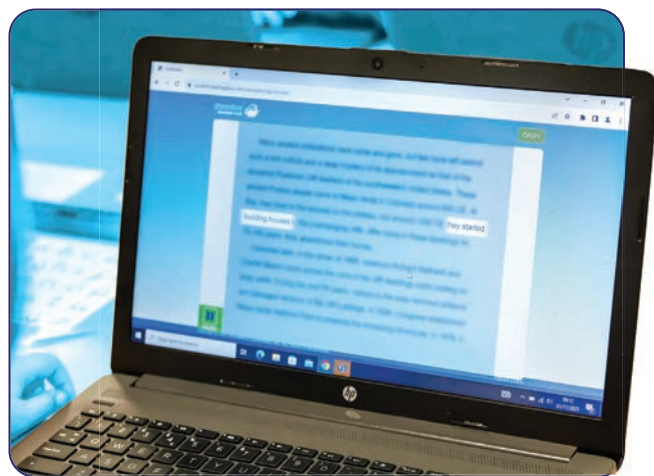
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Our reading results for Year 6 were EXS 63% and GDS 13%. After using the programme, our recent SATs results increased to 86% EXS and 41% GDS.

Verity Lee,
Assistant Headteacher at Sunnyside Spencer Academy





You can contact Sam at:
sam.henson@nga.org.uk

A word from the editor

Welcome to the latest edition of *Governing Matters*. Whether you're a brand-new or seasoned governor, a trustee navigating the complexities of multi academy trusts, an education leader striving to enhance governance effectiveness or embarking on a career as a governance professional, this edition truly has something for everyone.

Governing Matters has long been a staple of the NGA offer to members, but as a magazine it is way more than just another collection of articles; it's a community – a space where passionate volunteers can share stories, build ideas and plot solutions to the challenges facing our education system. We are so grateful to those of you who have contributed, and whether it's a case study, sharing your experience of governing or writing about something close to your heart, please contact me with any future article contributions – our magazine is nothing without you, and we invite you to be part of the story it tells.

As we welcome the soft, mellow hues of spring, this edition of *Governing Matters* arrives to provide a fresh dose of inspiration and gentle encouragement for all that you do. We kick off 2024 with a host of innovative and insightful reads that navigate the complex array of issues you may come up against at your next board meeting.

Following the natural flow of the annual calendar, this spring edition brings a renewed sense of energy and purpose. Yet, somewhat ironically, I want to first direct you to our very last feature, which turns attention back to our highly successful Greener Governance campaign, spearheaded by NGA co-CEO Emma Knights. Emma's poignant call for boards to

Governance in bloom – a springtime perspective

lead the charge in climate action serves as a reminder that while the natural world may be reviving itself from the cold slumber of winter, we cannot assume it can do so without our help. With boards playing a significant role in shaping the environmental impact of organizations, Emma advocates for the power of governance in driving a greener future.

The climate crisis looms large – one of the biggest challenges of our time. Yet, amid the reactive and fast-paced agenda setting that comes with governance responsibilities, boards may feel they lack the time to address this critical issue. To help you make the most of your board time this year, we have curated a series of articles focused on board efficiency. From navigating the complex art of board reporting to understanding the board's role in policy setting and review, we aim to streamline your governance processes, freeing up valuable time for strategic conversations.

In addition, we are thrilled to feature a suite of exciting external contributions. From an insightful interview with the co-CEOs of the Teacher Development Trust discussing the future of the teaching profession to the latest findings from Place2Be and the Centre for Emotional Health, there's no shortage of thought-provoking content to explore.

We hope you enjoy diving into the pages of this edition of *Governing Matters*. Happy reading! 🍀

“Our magazine is nothing without you, and we invite you to be part of the story it tells”

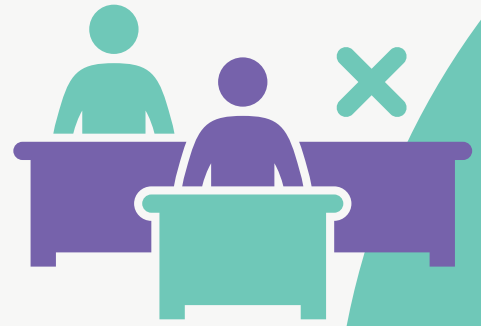


1. NGA COMMENTS ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ATTENDANCE CRISIS

The Department for Education (DfE) has responded to the persistent attendance issues in the education sector by launching 32 attendance hubs. These hubs, managed by schools with a proven track record of excellent attendance, aim to foster the exchange of practical ideas among schools. Additionally, £15m in funding has been allocated to the attendance mentor pilot programme, providing one-to-one support for persistently absent pupils and collaborating with them and their families to identify and address the root causes of school absenteeism.

While we are optimistic about the potential improvements resulting from the DfE's initiatives, it is crucial for schools and trusts nationwide to continuously assess and enhance their own practices related to boosting attendance. Regular attendance not only contributes significantly to academic achievement but is also vital for the social and emotional development of children and young people who have faced disruptions due to the lockdown years.

In spring term 2023, **almost 1.5 million children** were persistently absent. This is equivalent to **20.58%** of all children in state-funded mainstream or special schools (one in five children) – **DfE**



1,476,165

2. Tips for boards on tackling attendance

At a minimum, your organisation's attendance policy should align with the DfE's 'Working together to improve school attendance' guidelines (section one of the document). Beyond compliance, your policy represents an opportunity to establish a comprehensive school culture and approach prioritising attendance. The policy should highlight the significance of being in school, recognise potential barriers faced by pupils and families,

and highlight the school or trust's supportive measures to overcome these barriers. Consider incorporating attendance priorities into policies and improvement strategies related to:

- Raising attainment
- Support for disadvantaged pupils
- Behaviour management
- Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- Wellbeing
- Safeguarding.





3. THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF INTERNAL DATA

There has been less focus on the role of both national and internal data in the last few years, especially as the events of the pandemic lockdowns made it almost impossible to draw accurate comparisons from year to year. But internal data is without doubt a fundamental tool for boards in their approach to tackling attendance.

Regularly reviewing attendance data on a termly basis and benchmarking against comparable schools, understanding that the attendance landscape has various dimensions means you remain open minded about solutions: there is no one-size-fits-all solution to the attendance crisis gripping the sector. Pay particular attention to pupil groups facing barriers to attendance, but also recognise that absence is a complex issue with multifaceted causes; we now face a world where some pupils who previously never missed a day of school are now becoming less familiar faces at the school gates.

ILLUSTRATION: GETTY / SHUTTERSTOCK



Children's Mental Health Week @NGAMedia

As part of #ChildrensMentalHealthWeek 2024, NGA's Fiona Fearon worked alongside @Place2Be to discuss the importance of governing boards and wider school communities listening to young people. Such a simple thing but so important! A must read.

Read now: nga.org.uk/news-views/directory/childrens-mental-health-art-of-listening

Emma Knights @NGAEmmaK

A debate - to pay or not to pay for governance? Thanks so much to all our members who turned up to debate this issue today. Really rich & passionate exchanges. You are all doing so much for your schools & trusts: thank you

Westminster Insight @WMinsightUK

Our opening discussion focuses on school funding, resource management and revenue generation. Led by Emma Balchin from @NGAMedia

SOCIAL ROUNDUP

4. Collaboration with our stakeholders

Successful attendance improvement necessitates collaborative efforts. Clearly communicate attendance expectations to pupils and parents, offering additional support when needed, and actively involve them in discussions about their child's attendance. Evaluate how partnerships enhance your strategy, ensuring benefits to pupils are maximised.

Improving attendance and managing persistent absenteeism requires a collaborative, multifaceted approach. Governors and trustees play a pivotal role in this journey, setting culture, and expectations and helping to build an environment that children and young people love being a part of.

Fariha Choudhury, NGA advice officer



Guides for governors and trustees

NEW
EDITIONS

Welcome to Governance

Get clear and practical guidance on school governance, whether you're new or refreshing knowledge. It covers good practices for governing at a local authority maintained school, single academy trust, or academy within a multi academy trust and includes new guidance on pupils and learning, and accountability for educational performances.

Complimentary copies of this guide are available on request for new governors and trustees with NGA Gold membership or MAT academy committee membership.

Order your copy

Members £8 Non-members £16

nga.org.uk/welcome-to-governance



Governing a Multi Academy Trust

New or experienced trustees can find invaluable insights in this comprehensive guide. Discover what constitutes a high-quality trust and learn to work effectively with the local tier. Develop a clear vision for your trust's future and gain a deep understanding of your role as a trustee.

Complimentary copies of this guide are available for new trustees with NGA MAT membership.

Order your copy

Members £8 Non-members £16

nga.org.uk/mat-trustee-handbook



Ofsted inspection has been the subject of public scrutiny like never before in recent months. And rightly so. NGA contributed to a government inquiry that recently announced plans to improve inspection. It is vital that we have a seat at the table and represent the views of NGA members in this debate – after all, governors and trustees have unique insight into the inspection process and the enormous strain it can cause school leaders.

But of course, Ofsted continue to inspect schools and while plans have been made to improve both inspection quality and support for school staff, it will take time to fully implement the changes.

In the meantime, governing boards want to feel confident going into inspection and ensure that the outcome reflects the hard work of school staff, particularly given the complex picture of post-pandemic issues that are impacting education. But we also recognise that governors and trustees are themselves subject to a range of pressures and increasing workload.

So, how can governing boards build confidence ahead of inspection? Firstly, note the focus – this is about building confidence, not preparing to meet a tick-list of Ofsted expectations. NGA has long held the view that governing boards should not be doing lots of extra work to prepare solely in preparation for Ofsted. As boards monitor, support and challenge, they get to know their schools' strengths and weaknesses very well. It is highly unlikely that in one visit the inspectorate can learn things boards and school leaders don't already know. Governing boards need to have confidence in the decisions they collectively make, while convincing leaders who are working hard to deliver the strategy that there is no need to fear the consequences of an inspection.

Ofsted: authenticity over conformity



Nina Sharma, senior policy and research officer, introduces NGA guidance on Ofsted, and why it builds confidence to show what you are, rather than 'should be'

Navigating Ofsted inspection

NGA has published a new tool to help boards build confidence ahead of inspection. Navigating Ofsted Inspection: a Tool for Governing Boards sets out how to demonstrate effective governance through the course of routine board business.

Six areas are covered by the tool:

1. Governing board self-evaluation
2. Vision and strategy
3. Quality of education
4. Stakeholder engagement
5. Safeguarding
6. Statutory duties

Each area includes a range of NGA resources that boards can use to

review and – where opportunities are identified – improve practice. We've also included examples of questions inspectors may ask.

This new tool supplements our existing range of guidance, support and training on Ofsted inspection. I hope you'll continue to refer to NGA resources to help you build confidence and ensure your board is fulfilling all the elements of effective governance.

If you would like support in reviewing your practice and make plans to improve the quality, performance and impact of your board, consider an NGA external review of governance. We recommend that all boards undertake an external review every three years and more often during times of change.

NGA will continue to represent the views of those governing and offer support on inspection. If you're anticipating a visit from Ofsted this term, of course you'll recognise the challenges it brings, but I hope you can also embrace the opportunity to showcase your board's effectiveness, your collaboration with school staff and the impact it has on your school community. 🇬🇧



Children's Mental Health Week

Sarah Williams-Robbins at Place2Be encourages children and young people to make their voices heard and share what matters

Ten years ago, a former colleague here at Place2Be was keen to give children's mental health the attention it deserved. As a charity providing expert mental health support within school communities, we see the huge difference this makes to the social and educational outcomes for young people.

From the germ of an idea arose the first Children's Mental Health Week, designed to shine a spotlight on the issue, generate media interest in the topic, build understanding and make the case for sustainable funding to support mental wellbeing from an early age.

A decade later, with the Covid-19 years, and an economic downturn to take in account, Children's Mental Health Week has grown into a national event. And while Place2Be is delighted to be the organisation behind this initiative, the week will only ever be a success if we work in collaboration with like-minded partners, like the NGA.

As we come to the end of this year's 'campaign',

we reflect on what we have achieved and learned – and look at what's next.

Young voices matter

The theme of the Week was 'My Voice Matters'. We wanted to encourage children and young people to use their voices and share what matters to them.

Children and young people took part in workshops to shape the event, informing our messaging to schools, families, parents and carers, and the activities we created for them. This included top tips for families, schools and children which were written by young people themselves.

In a series of video interviews, pupils from Place2Be partner schools Ark Charter Academy and Ark Globe Academy shared their thoughts on mental health, what matters to them, and how they like to express themselves. We also heard from young people from the Childnet Youth Advisory Board on social media and mental health, and invited pupils from Knightsbridge School to guest-edit The Week Junior.

Stigma still an issue

In January, we commissioned research organisation YouGov to find out from children and young people what they want and need to support their own mental health.

The data revealed that 55% of 8- to 16-year-olds say they still face barriers in accessing mental health support. We also found that 60% of primary and secondary school students say they worry about school work and exams, making it the top concern among children



Sarah Williams-Robbins is director of marketing and communications at Place2Be

and young people. We press-released these findings and worked with news outlets including BBC Newsround, Sky News and BBC Radio 5 Live to share and discuss the results, while our clinical team provided tips on how to manage exam nerves.

From Sesame Street to Bash Street

The week also saw stars get involved in conversations around the importance of using your voice. In a short film series, BAFTA Young presenters interviewed TV, film, music and sports personalities as they explored different ways young people can make their voices heard.

In partnership with Sesame Workshop, we launched 'Celebrate The Day', a video in which Sesame Street's Elmo and Place2Be Ambassador Yolanda Brown discuss

healthy habits to promote positive wellbeing.

In Beano magazine, Dennis, Gnasher and the Bash Street Kids took part in their very own Express Yourself day for Children's Mental Health Week too.

Cross-sector conversations

The week provides an opportunity for us to have important conversations about children and young people's mental health, and the need for cross-sector connections.

In a joint letter to the Department of Health and Social Care, covered in Politics Home, Place2Be and 28 leading charities called for long-term sustainable investment in school-based mental health services.

Alongside the NAHT, we wrote an article featured in TES calling for schools to be given more support for mental health. We also published a blog by NGA's Fiona Fearon, discussing how to create cultures within schools where pupils' voices are not only heard, but actively sought out and valued.

Nearly 100 politicians across England, Scotland and Wales shared their support on social media with #ChildrensMentalHealthWeek and promoted our resources. We were pleased to secure a Westminster Hall debate in Parliament, led by ex-shadow cabinet member for mental health, Dr Rosena Allin-Khan MP.

Dame Rachel de Souza, the children's commissioner for England, also lent her support: "Children often tell

me issues with their mental health act as a significant barrier to their overall success, so we all have a role to play in supporting and helping to improve children's mental health. Only when we all work together will we see meaningful change that will help transform the lives of young people."

School engagement

Most importantly, schools across the UK took part in the week. It was great to see that so many of your schools – 687 so far – have embraced the theme this year and helping raise vital funds for Place2Be.

If you got involved, please do add yourself to our map, so we have a full picture of the engagement across the nations and regions.

It's a tough economic climate, so we are waiting to see how much money has been raised to enable us to support even more schools.

What is clear is that 10 years on, there's still a big appetite for meaningful engagement with activities that support young people's mental wellbeing. We need to continue to work together, across communities, to ensure this doesn't just happen in one week of the year. Investing in young people's mental health should be long-term and sustainable. 🍌

Useful links

For more information about Place2Be's range of services, and to access free mental health resources for schools, visit www.place2be.org.uk



The Teacher Development Trust: Fostering expertise and growth

NGA's deputy chief executive, **Sam Henson**, spoke with the Teacher Development Trust's co-CEOs David Weston and Gareth Conyard

TDT is a UK charity that was founded in 2012 to help schools to become places where teachers can thrive professionally. Co-CEOs David Weston and Gareth Conyard discussed TDT's work supporting the profession – and their thoughts on what needs to change.

How did you come to work in education and with TDT?

David: I taught for 10 years, with mixed experiences of my own professional development. Initial teacher training had some good elements but didn't fully prepare me for the role. As I became a better practitioner, I began to train others and used research to understand what builds

successful development cultures in schools. I reflected on how we could help schools and continuing professional development (CPD) providers to work together, but the demise of various government agencies at that time meant there wasn't an organisation centred around teacher development. It was suggested to me that I set up a charity to solve this problem; I founded TDT, and we've been focused on this for 12 years now.

"...that joy of watching people really grow and develop...grow their own confidence and shift the culture definitely makes us want to keep coming back."

Gareth: I joined the civil service in 2003, working in higher education, early years and then school policy. I started working on teaching and leading the relationship with teaching unions. I quickly realised that supporting teachers was key to improving the system, so when it came to leaving the civil service, TDT was an obvious fit.



SAM HENSON
NGA'S DEPUTY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE



What's the link between governance and TDT's mission?

People must *want* to develop, and this feeling can definitely be supported and helped. But that process requires the correct culture from the top, and this starts with governors and trustees. It involves taking professional development of staff seriously, asking questions about it, promoting it, recognising it as part of the budget and prioritising it where possible. Equally important is not ignoring their own professional development, too. We know, for example, that NGA has lots of support to help governing boards understand their role.

Is professional development taken seriously enough by boards?

Through the survey work that we do with hundreds of schools, we see the difference between governing boards that set a school vision and ask about standards but say CPD is a staff responsibility, versus boards that gain a sense of what it feels like to work in the school and what

“It doesn't matter how strong the evidence is – if it doesn't meet your people where they are, it won't be effective”

the professional learning strategy is. What schools can achieve is intimately connected to people's development and learning. Having been on two school governing boards, you must set that tone of: we believe in the wellbeing and development of people; we see development as a fundamental value.

Are teachers and leaders able to embrace a culture of professional development?

There are many challenges in teaching. When we look at the data on teacher wellbeing and levels of stress, we can see it is not a benign environment to be working in. So, we want to be evidence-led, but we also know that it doesn't matter how strong the evidence is – if it doesn't meet your people where they are, it's not going to be effective.

Sometimes interventions around professional development are viewed

through the lens of making immediate improvements to someone's classroom practice. But they can also support the growth of peer learning networks that inspire and rekindle the love of a subject, which means somebody might stay in teaching at a point where they were less likely to. It's not just putting people through a treadmill of courses; it's more complex than that. How are we implementing it with care? It can't be cut and pasted between schools.

How might artificial intelligence (AI) be used to improve teaching and learning?

It's going to take a while for us to figure out how to use it best in different classrooms and across different topics. Modern foreign language teaching is clearly being revolutionised by technology such as Duolingo, which allows someone to have a quick conversation in a different language. But we need to do more experimentation and be cautious in evaluation.

“People often over overestimate the amount of change a technology will make initially, but they underestimate the amount of change they'll make in the long term.”

We're very excited about the potential in teacher development, too. We've been working on the tool 'Teacherverse', with the idea

that we can get teachers to play and learn skills by making mistakes practising on AI virtual children and colleagues. For example, your conversations can go terribly 10 times with an AI colleague, but by the time you do the real one you've learnt from the feedback.

What are your big asks for the incoming government, and what change is needed to sustain the sector?

More than anything else, everyone just needs to pause for breath. That doesn't mean that things don't need to change, but whoever comes next should try to think about more sustainable ways of making effective change, rather than looking for short-term gimmicks. We're not in a gimmick space now. They need to think about processes – how can they engage with the profession and make changes in a sustainable, collaborative way.

We are particularly interested in the Labour Party's idea to

introduce an entitlement to professional development for teachers and school leaders – we think that could be a positive addition to the system.

What are your thoughts on the future of accountability in education?

Fundamentally, the education system is the beneficiary of an enormous amount of trust, power, influence from the public, families, young people and businesses. The public needs to feel that we are accountable for that, and they need to have the confidence that we are delivering the right sorts of things in the right sorts of ways.



“The first thing that should happen is to say, I need to challenge you on that, but I’m going to support you.”

The problem we've got with accountability is that the only conversation happening is around quality. But when you're talking quality, this should encompass the inputs, processes and outputs. The inputs are about making sure we have a good balance of ingredients going into the system, getting the right balance between real experts, expert tools and standard processes, and things that we know are likely to work. And then outputs: how we show that what's coming out at the end in terms of wellbeing, exam results and employability are good.

How do we make the case for becoming a school teacher or leader?

We don't need heroes in the classroom. We don't need heroes to be governors and trustees. We need people who care, want to do a good job, and want to have a positive impact on kids and their local communities. Our overwhelming impression from speaking to people who take on those roles is that it is sometimes hard. There are challenges to it, but it is incredibly rewarding and supports you developmentally. We've never spoken to anyone who's been a governor or trustee who regretted doing it, even when they found it busy. So, if you want to try and make the case for becoming a teacher or a school leader, or becoming a school governor, you need to fundamentally improve the system so that it is better. ❧

Questions for governing boards to ask about teacher development

- What are we trying to achieve as a school/trust, and how does our approach to staff CPD fit within this – is it supplementary or fundamental?
- Have we achieved impact through our current CPD offer, and if we didn't, what could we do differently?
- Have we investigated different types of CPD and how they could have a positive impact and how can we be sure about that?
- What is our current CPD offer to governors and trustees? Are they setting the tone for professional development to the rest of the school/trust?

School Governors - We need your help



As a school governor we recognise the vital role that you play:

- Improving the lives of children and young people
- Making a difference in your schools and surrounding communities
- And much more

We would appreciate your support to make a potentially lifesaving difference in your school and wider community.

There are over 85,000 defibrillators registered on The Circuit, including more than 11,000 in schools. However, we know that thousands of school defibrillators are not registered. If your school has one or more defibrillators – please help us to ensure it is registered.

It takes less than 5 minutes to register a defibrillator. There is no cost to register.

Give your defibrillators their best chance to save lives in your school and local community

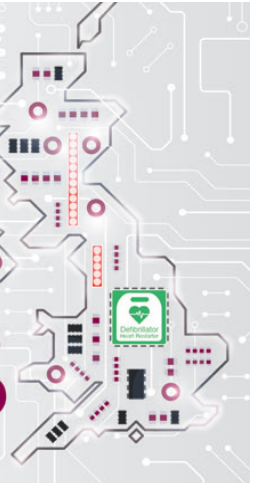
The Circuit is the national network of defibrillators which provides ambulance services with visibility of the nearest registered defibrillator. This helps emergency call handlers to direct bystanders to their nearest defibrillator when 999 is called – at a time when every second counts.

Tragically, less than one in ten people survive an out-of-hospital cardiac arrest in the UK. Every minute without CPR and defibrillation reduces the chance of survival by up to 10 percent.

Registration on The Circuit ensures that if there is a cardiac arrest at the school the first person to call 999 will be instructed to send someone to fetch the defibrillator, there will be no delay waiting for a first aider or senior staff to take control of the situation.

(The Circuit)
The National Defibrillator Network

Put your defibrillators on the map



Defibrillators can be registered for the hours and periods that they are available

Whether your defibrillator is available in an external cabinet 24/7, or only during school hours in term time, please help us to ensure that it is registered. It could make the difference for someone and their loved ones.

How to check if your defibrillators are currently registered

You can check whether defibrillators in your school are currently registered here: defibfinder.uk

If not registered, please ask the appropriate member of your school team to register at: thecircuit.uk (or search The Circuit).

As the Guardian of the defibrillator, they will receive reminders to check the defibrillator status, along with other updates including when pads are about to expire. So, if the day it's needed arrives, it'll be ready to go.

If you have any questions, please contact: ndnsupport@bhf.org.uk

Help us save more lives

**VISIT THE
CIRCUIT HERE**



Rethinking board reporting

The following tale of unrealistic burdens when it comes to board reporting is based on a true(ish) story...

As the spring term board meeting fast approached, Trishna sat down to prepare, worn out by a stressful start to the working week yet undeterred by the chaotic scene of her husband and daughter preparing dinner. She set up her laptop on the kitchen table with grit and determination. As the governance portal revealed what awaited her, she inhaled sharply. Trishna, dedicated to governing at the trust where her children attended school, felt her energy flicker and then dim; her unwavering devotion began to waver ever so slightly.

Another excessively dense CEO report instantly started taking a toll as she meandered down a long, daunting labyrinth of convoluted paragraphs, complex graphs and mountains of jargon, inducing restlessness and fatigue.

The meeting papers, a comprehensive compilation of 13 different documents, along with a tangled web of policies, bedraggled Trishna's weary mind. Despite her marketing executive mind pulling its best punches, each document, with its own unique brand of verbosity, piled up

to a page count beyond her limits as a volunteer navigating governance duties with family life after a long day in the office.

The meeting looming, 48 hours away, Trishna anticipated a familiar routine – read lots, prepare diligently and identify big questions before discovering last-minute changes. As if by magic, an ominous email pinged, announcing two documents to be tabled at the meeting.

Taking a deeper, longer, more resolved gasp of air, Trishna momentarily escaped by putting on the kettle, before planting

a goodnight kiss on her kids. Resolute, she retreated to her home office, embracing a battle of endurance she wasn't sure how to endure.

Not far from the truth?

It might sound extreme, but it's a familiar story. Trishna's experience is one we hear fairly often, while simultaneously, we hear of executive leaders who are wearied by the burden of writing excessive board reports.

While board reporting is an essential ingredient to governing effectively, it shouldn't come at the cost of unrealistic work demands on either staff or volunteers. Mountains of papers can overwhelm rather than inform.

Worse still, they can lead to poor board retention and poor wellbeing for the reader and/or writer.

Tackling the challenge

Fuelled by good intentions, executive leaders can easily fall into the trap of writing every detail in comprehensive reports, leaving no stone unturned. This can quickly turn into a false economy or even prevent board members from asking simple yet vital questions. Excessive detail can also hide things that need to be tackled in plain sight.

One thing NGA has never quite understood is the reluctance for the powers-that-be to introduce more governance knowledge into both leadership and staff training and CPD in schools and trusts. Some leaders simply carry on the legacy of previous leaders, while some boards equally fall into the “this is the way it has always been done” trap. If you take anything at all from this article it should be this: engage in a two-way dialogue on what is needed and what isn’t, both from the perspective of the board, with finite time to devote to voluntary roles, and those writing the documents, with equally limited time and well documented excessive workloads. Opening up this conversation may reduce workload through simple yet genuine collaboration.

Mastery of the art

Effective board demands a thorough exploration of purpose and format. NGA has seen many instances where failing to have this discussion results in frustration and wasted time. Executive leaders should provide information in a way that allows boards to monitor progress

against development priorities, targets, and budgets, tailoring it to suit the board’s role.

Many organisations struggle with board reporting. Board Intelligence reveals reports are increasing in length and associated costs, yet this coincides with reports being perceived as weak or unhelpful. An external viewpoint can be valuable for focused conversations. One question that is helpful to ask is: is the amount of work going into our board reporting worth the cost?

Every board member should be empowered to engage in discussions. This necessitates an awareness of data collection, frequency, time and costs. A reporting format that keeps

feedback, actively participate in shaping the reporting format, and avoid settling for reports that don’t meet their needs.

The reporting role should never stifle challenge by closing down debate with all the answers to all the questions imaginable. Rather it must promote helpful challenge through facilitating reflection and critical thinking.

Breaking the cycle

Don’t let board reporting become a stagnant ritual. Regularly review, ensuring reporting evolves alongside changing priorities. Key principles for effective reporting:

- **Strategic focus:** reports should be laser-focused on strategic priorities, not bogged down with operational details.
 - **Targeted information:** limited to the necessary information, presented in a clear and concise manner. Avoid data overload and jargon.
 - **Transparency and assurance:** reports should paint a complete picture, including challenges and areas needing improvement. Cultivate a culture of open communication and honest dialogue.
 - **Data literacy:** ensure reports are understood by all board members. Use clear visuals and explanations to demystify complex information.
 - **Continuous improvement:** regularly review and refine the reporting process based on feedback and evolving needs. Embrace external perspectives for an objective assessment.
- Remember:** The board report is not the end goal; it’s a tool to facilitate good governance. Collectively reflect on how reporting works for your board – if the answer is it doesn’t, do something about it. 📌

“One question helpful to ask is: is the amount of work going into our board reporting worth the cost?”

the board focused on strategic functions while avoiding operational distractions is crucial.

Focusing on improving reporting, boards can quickly find they enhance efficiency, effectiveness and positive board culture with strengthened relationships with the executive team. In the long term, quality reporting eases the board’s workload.

Shared responsibility

Both executives and boards share responsibility for shaping a reporting system that works. Executives must understand the board’s needs and provide high-quality, well-organised information that directly aligns with strategic priorities. Boards, in turn, must provide clear



Sam Henson,
NGA deputy
chief
Executive,
and **Ella**
Colley, NGA
head of
content



More and more, schools and trusts are grappling with the increasingly heavy burden of financial sustainability. While a long-term government plan is needed as schools face inflationary pressures and ever-expanding social challenges, an effective fundraising plan can go a long way in offering light relief with a big impact. Many state schools are recognising this, reflected in our expanding membership over the last eight years.

What is the IDPE?

IDPE is the UK's professional membership organisation supporting schools and trusts to develop professional fundraising and engagement programmes. We champion best practice and provide training, guidance, benchmarking and working in partnership across the schools' sector.

What do we mean by development?

At IDPE, we define development as 'professional fundraising and

engagement in schools'. It is about more than just income generation, it is the process by which schools seek to engage with their community to generate support to advance a school's vision.

The role of governing boards in success

Leadership is especially important to fundraising success in state schools and the headteacher or governing board will be pivotal. So, how can governors and trustees support a school or trust as they embark on their development journey?

1 Create a long-term vision

The governing board is responsible for shaping the school's vision and strategic plan. For fundraising to flourish, a long-term plan is essential – you cannot ask for money without something to raise money for. Successful fundraising starts with your

school or trust's story: this is your chance to share your vision and purpose: why do you need support and what difference can your community make?

2 It takes time

Fundraising success doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to build relationships with potential donors, therefore a project that requires significant investment such as upgrading or building new facilities will also require a significant amount of lead-in time. IDPE's recent benchmarking report demonstrates that while there can be a small return on investment during the initial years, longer-term it does pay off.

3 Make development part of school life

Development is a team sport. Every member of staff has access to a network of potential supporters, and sharing these networks can significantly grow engagement and fundraising across the school community. Governing boards can support this by encouraging development to be part of school life, and for development to be 'seen' and 'heard' across the school.

In partnership with More Partnership and the Wolfson Foundation, IDPE has developed the State School Fundraising Toolkit, a free resource designed to equip schools with the tools and knowledge to build their fundraising capacity. It focuses on the role of school leaders in fundraising, and includes examples, case studies and templates from a range of UK state schools. [👉](#)

Useful links

Find out more: idpe.org.uk/#stateschoolfundraisingtoolkit
Find out more about membership: info@idpe.org.uk

Fundraising success: big vision, big impact

CEO of the Institute of Development Professionals in Education (IDPE)

Louise Bennett explores how IDPE can support schools starting out on their fundraising journey

England has a particular problem with keeping its teachers, with an average annual attrition rate of 10% in the first two years, one of the highest rates among the OECD countries. The issue of retention is most acute among newly qualified teachers, and subjects such as physics. However, losing staff at this rate is not inevitable, and governors and trustees have a crucial role to play in creating and maintaining an attractive working environment.

Early Career Framework

Recognising the attrition issue, the UK government introduced the Early Career Framework (ECF) as part of the statutory induction process, and this was rolled out nationally in 2021. While the ECF has had some benefits, it does not appear to have substantially reduced attrition, and the most obvious omission is that it has little subject specific content. A recent survey (Teacher Tapp, 2023) indicated that fewer than one in five early career teachers (ECTs) feel that the materials are specialised to their subject or phase. The same survey also highlighted that 42% of second-year ECTs felt that their timetable does not meet their needs.

Lessons from Scotland

One does not need to travel very far to find solutions to some of these issues. Recent data suggests that the dropout rate in Scotland of teachers is only 1% from the second year onwards. While research is ongoing to pinpoint the mechanisms of cause and effect, we would suggest the following:

Keeping your ECTs

Chris Shepherd of the Institute of Physics on slowing attrition rates among early career teachers



- Teachers in Scotland are only allowed to teach within their subject, and this policy is actively overseen by the General Teaching Council of Scotland. In England, most physics teachers are also required to teach biology and chemistry, increasing their preparation load considerably by reducing the number of repeat classes and requiring them to become expert in unfamiliar subjects. Some are timetabled to teach out of their laboratories in rooms where practical work is impossible.



Chris Shepherd,
Strategic Lead
for Teacher
Recruitment
and Retraining
Institute
of Physics
(education@iop.org)

- Scotland has smaller and tighter-knit subject communities in which everyone knows and supports everyone else – eliminating the problem of isolation that many teachers of shortage subjects, such as physics, face in England.
- Teachers have knowledge of and can access substantial subject-specific professional development opportunities.

Checklist

- Are your ECTs actively encouraged to seek out subject-specific development opportunities, and meet with their subject communities?
- Do your ECTs have a sympathetic timetable, with repeat classes within year groups, teaching mainly within their own subject specialism?
- Are ECTs given priority for teaching in specialist spaces e.g. laboratories, music rooms, where those are available? ☑

SUPPORT

Support from the Institute of Physics
Encourage trainees, teachers and technicians to sign up for free resources and networking opportunities, including electronic copies of our magazine Classroom Physics: bit.ly/IoP-sign-up

Support from other subject organisations
Visit www.subjectassociations.org.uk

Fast-track your governance skills

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Do you want to fast-track your skills as a governor, trustee, or governance professional? NGA Learning Link is packed with over 65 expert-led interactive e-learning modules designed to help you quickly fill knowledge gaps and be confident in tackling any challenge your organisation may face.



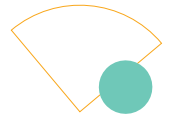
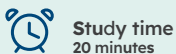
An introduction to local governance

NEW
RELEASE

New to local governance? Our introductory new module is designed to guide you through local governance and is the ideal accompaniment to your trust-specific induction process.

The module will help you:

- understand your role within the trust structure
- familiarise yourself with the commonly carried out responsibilities by the local tier
- understand and learn how to make the most of your key relationships
- discover development opportunities to help you thrive as a new governor in a MAT



Membership	Learning Link
None	£230
Gold	£110
Standard	£160

Discounts are available for group purchases for multi academy trusts and local authority governor services.

Outstanding Governance Awards 2023

A closer look at the winners and finalists of our prestigious awards recognising the superstars of governance

At the start of this academic year, NGA were excited to be joined by governing boards and governance professionals as we recognised achievements in four categories:

- Outstanding clerk to a governing board
- Outstanding lead governance professional
- Outstanding governance in a single school
- Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust

Outstanding clerk to a governing board

Celebrating the integral role of the clerk, judges commended the enthusiasm and commitment to improving governance shown by all our finalists.

For her outstanding practice, insight and instrumental role in transforming the board's approach to strategic oversight, Diane Moss from Tiffin School received a highly commended award.

Winning the award was Tim Bennett of Kings Heath Primary School. A trusted and

reliable adviser, and architect of the school's annual governance statement, the board said that he "ensures, to the best of his abilities, that we lead this school in the interests of the children, staff and the wider community".

Outstanding lead governance professional

Recognising the important role of those responsible for leading and managing governance teams, judges described the finalists as "excellent role models for governance professionals ... helping to foster a culture of effective and ethical governance in the organisations they support".

Becky Perkes, for service to Our Lady of the Magnificat Multi-Academy Company, and Mel Greener, for service to Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, were both recognised as finalists.

For his commitment to effective communication



and empowering others, Allan Howells from The Learning Partnership received a highly commended award, recognising the pivotal role he played in transforming governance at the local level.

Maria Maltby,
David Ross
Education Trust
(above)

Winning the award was Maria Maltby for service to the David Ross Education Trust. Committed to ensuring that decision-making is informative and effective, Maria is described by the trust's CEO as having driven "a remarkable turnaround" of the governance of the trust. Developing a number of toolkits for those governing, Maria's efficiency, effectiveness and commitment to excellent governance have made a significant and positive impact on the trust.

Maria shared insights from her experience of an external review of governance in the Winter 2023-24 edition of *Governing Matters*.



Outstanding governance in a single school

Our award for outstanding governance in a single school recognised the achievements of three finalists who had each faced a range of challenges but demonstrated how the eight

elements of effective governance enable them to fulfil their core responsibilities and go beyond the basics.

The board of Saint Ambrose College was recognised as a finalist, with their effectiveness praised, in particular the positive culture the board had driven in relation to wellbeing and inclusivity.

Excelling in its strong vision and practices, efforts to develop a positive culture for staff, and demonstrating a passion for raising the aspirations of pupils, David Nieper Academy received a highly commended award.

Winning the award, the board of University Technical College Leeds excels in its strength of vision, which underpins all aspects of its strategic decision-making. Judges were struck by the trustees' passion to positively impact pupils' lives and the effective and enthusiastic way they approach governance.

Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust

Our award for outstanding governance in a multi academy trust recognised four finalists who evidenced how their governance practice has evolved, demonstrated a robust strategic approach, and promoted a healthy culture and positive change. All were examples

A word from the chair

Reflecting on the board's achievement, award-winning chair Tim Craven offers some insight into the importance of a strong vision to effective governance

It has been a privilege to lead the University Technical College Leeds board over the last four years through a period of such positive change. A fantastic Ofsted result, increasing student numbers, near 0% NEET figures since opening in 2016 alongside some amazing destinations for our students have been the highlights. Introducing engineering and digital T levels in 2023/24 has been another stepping stone for the college.

From a governance perspective, success has been achieved through:

- Creating a compelling vision for the college to allow the recruitment and retention of a diverse trustee team bringing a wide range of expertise to the table.
- Keeping a focus on the UTC Leeds vision to ensure the annually agreed strategic initiatives were prioritised, planned and delivered.
- Ensuring the trustee link roles were clearly defined and aligned with the relevant school leaders. This enabled the development of trusted working relationships and built the trustee knowledge of UTC Leeds, which was so important to good decision-making.
- Making the board and committee meetings safe spaces for open and transparent discussions. This enabled trustees to operate as highly effective 'critical friends'.
- Ensuring careers education was prioritised. The investment in long-term relationships with local businesses to embed their projects and insights into the curriculum has been so valuable.

University
Technical
College Leeds
(left)

of central and local governance working together as one organisation to best serve their schools and communities.

Invictus Education and Embark Federation were both recognised as finalists with both highly commended for their commitments to driving governance improvement, and building governance structures that ensured the voice of the community was listened to and acted upon.

Highly regarded for its work on environmental sustainability, Northern Star Academies Trust received a highly commended award for its notable commitment to meaningful local governance and focus on the value of community knowledge and the ability of the local tier to feed this through to the trust board.

Winning the award was Ambitions Academies Trust, whose story epitomises how governance in a growing organisation needs to evolve, with judges noting the value placed on local governance and the board's excellent support and clarity about the local tier's role without limiting its ability to engage and raise concerns. It is clear the board is driven by a commitment to ensure every pupil reaches their potential.

NGA's awards are a truly special time to reflect on not just effective practice, but governing boards, governance professionals and executive leaders who will keep on pushing towards delivering the best governance has to offer. NGA would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all our winners and runners-up, as well as those shortlisted. 🍀



Tim Bennett of
Kings Heath
Primary School
(above)

Ambitions
Academies
(right)

A word from the chair

Reflecting on its achievement, trust chair Caroline Sard offers some insight into the importance of local governance in the MAT

Ambitions Academies Trust is a local trust enabling a supportive culture at all levels. Every school that has joined the trust was failing and we now comprise 13 academies ranging from nursery upwards, including two expanding special schools.

Supporting our schools on to new, positive trajectories has been hugely satisfying but challenging. Struggling schools often come to us with ineffective governance, which must be addressed as a priority. This begins with the introduction of an interim committee where members of the trust's executive team and trustees work alongside the principal to support the school while it undergoes a complete review and new processes are embedded. Questioning is designed to be intensive but also to offer support and encouragement where needed.

When academies have become more secure, academy advisory committees (local governing bodies) are introduced. The scheme of delegation, terms of reference and roles are reviewed annually to ensure committee members are confident in their role, providing effective and consistent support and challenge.

Each academy has a link trustee, and the school is visited regularly to provide a positive link between trustees and the academy committees. A further link is created with the termly chairs' forum, which offers a great opportunity for information sharing and networking."



Doing governance differently

Susan Beasley, executive lead for governance and compliance at Mowbray Education Trust, talks about the importance of an adaptable trust governance model

The modern world is rapidly changing, requiring organisations to keep pace with new ways of working. Within Mowbray Education Trust, we noticed that it wasn't just the world around us that was evolving, but our trust, too. This realisation became a golden opportunity to restructure our governance framework to be more agile as we grow and to accommodate the needs of all our schools.

In 2020, we made tentative movements towards growth. We knew that welcoming other schools to the trust would require more flexibility and growing room. Not only did we shape the trust to accommodate a new school, we also sought to make changes that would benefit all our schools and enhance our opportunities for future growth and mobility. To achieve this, we restructured our trust governance, establishing local governing committees to replace the previous individual local governing boards, in addition to our trust-level committees.

Cohesive collaboration

Local governors play a crucial role in ensuring schools receive the resources they need, stay focused on their vision, and hold

school leaders accountable for pupil outcomes and experiences. We wanted to establish new ways of working that opened an opportunity to review how we were operating and expand our best practices to serve the schools and align with the trust's central mission.

For example, following an internal review of our governance system, we found that headteachers were often challenged with making decisions while balancing input from multiple stakeholders with different views, highlighting the importance of effective and cohesive collaboration.

Community committee

We also identified an opportunity to reframe our governance around the geographical clusters of our schools, forming one of our local governing committees around community to address the local context of each school while allowing them to retain their individual identities. The new structure also consists of two other

specialised local governing committees, focusing on curriculum and performance. The committees work within their remits to ensure standards are upheld and benchmarks met across all areas of assessment.

Additionally, each committee is made up of a team of



ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

governors with relevant expertise and skillsets, enabling them to effectively oversee best practice. The local committees then report to our trust-level governing committees, also split into three categories: quality of education; governance; and remuneration, and audit, finance and risk.

Model mission

To transition to this model, we first onboarded our current governors with the restructure. We started the discussion with members early to provide plenty of time for planning and organising and allowing space for adjustment. The process was collaborative and driven by trustees who really believed in the new model and had the expertise needed to bring it to fruition.

We then set out a clear vision and mission for the new model and communicated with stakeholders about how these changes would improve governance and support positive growth across the trust. We encouraged our existing governors to be involved with the transition and feed into the planning. We organised the roll-

out of the new structure and made all governors aware of the transition process and timescale long before it took place to allow ample time for new roles to settle in minds.

Best practice benefits

Following the roll-out of the new structure, we began to see the benefits of the model. Having local governing committees meant our trust-wide vision and values were upheld more effectively and each school felt more connected to each other and the trust. The schools also benefitted from the sharing of resources and expertise as the governors who worked across multiple schools could see how the best practice models were shared between them.

We also saw a positive impact on school culture as community became a central theme and our holistic values were realised. Further, our internal accountability and benchmarking frameworks were improved by effective and efficient reporting, scrutiny and monitoring through the local governors. We've seen greater collaboration between trust leaders, individual school leaders and local governors, all working toward the same vision of 'children first'.

One great example of increased community engagement was when one school began a food and clothing bank for families in need and extended its offering to all trust schools.

The cohesion on this project was a true testament to how our new governance structure worked, placing community at the heart of what we do to shape a positive and holistic culture.

A new collaborative approach

Our new structure was deemed effective during our recent external governance review. We received a glowing evaluation that our local governing committees "have a holistic view of all schools in the trust rather than serving only one school" and allow for "excellent internal benchmarking".

This evaluation reflects the success of our mission to cultivate a symbiotic trust model that ensures both cohesion and collaboration across schools and maintains our high standards of excellence, especially when onboarding new schools.

Gratitude to volunteers

One of the core lessons we took away from the experience was to choose an adaptable model that would grow to suit the trust as it changes and evolves. As the plan to restructure was rooted in our trust preparing to bring on new schools, growth has always remained a central priority.

Throughout the process it was paramount to continually assess how trust growth would play into each decision made, inspiring us to centre it within our key mission and implement a model that would not only allow us to evolve, but celebrate it.

We are grateful for our strong team of governors, who have made the transition as smooth as possible and made it a great success. Looking forward, we are excited to continue on our positive trajectory as we grow and progress to best suit the needs of all our children and communities. 📍



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Investing time

Amy Wright, NGA's clerking development manager, gives some tips on making the most of your precious time.

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen R Covey said: "The key is not in spending time, but in investing it."

Time is a precious and finite resource. The strategic investment of it is particularly crucial for governance professionals, and every minute wisely invested strengthens the whole: you, your board, the school or trust you're supporting, and all the children and young people in their care.

Time management is a valuable skill and one that needs to be tailored to the skills and strengths of the individual.

Play to your strengths: leverage your skills, like typing for efficient note-taking.

Sharpen your skills: prioritise professional development for time-saving techniques.

Focus on outcomes: plan effective meeting agendas and minutes capturing key points, including questioning, challenge, and support – not verbatim transcripts.

Adapt resources: use existing templates, like the NGA's annual planner and minutes template.

Boost your efficiency!

Communication is key to efficiency, but itself can take an inordinate amount of time. Set parameters and add an email signature stating the times you are available to respond to queries. Assess the most effective



and efficient communication methods – sometimes a quick call can resolve an issue rather than multiple emails.

Various academics advocate numerous time management principles. A process that works for me is:

- **DO:** if you find you are putting off a particular necessary and important task, schedule time to complete it first before you move on to easier, more enjoyable tasks.
- **DEFER:** prioritise tasks with deadlines and defer those that aren't time sensitive.
- **DELEGATE:** if you can, delegate anything that doesn't have to be done by you or can be done by a more efficient method.
- **DELETE:** when reviewing your tasks for the day, week and term, check they are all necessary and important and eliminate those that aren't.



AMY WRIGHT
CLERKING
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER

● **DOWNTIME:** it is important to have downtime so you have the capacity to do the work that needs doing at the right time.

And remember, review is a big part of any process; as things change, you may need to adapt. When I started clerking, I wrote paper to-do lists and used post-it notes as reminders; now I use an electronic calendar and schedule time to work on both specific and general tasks, with alerts at appropriate times so nothing is missed or forgotten. I also schedule times of de-focus for strategic thought and planning.

The spring term is a great time to review your practice and ensure everything is in place for the next year. Set reminders to plan meeting agendas with the chair and headteacher or senior executive leader; have templates ready to add in the business in accordance with annual planners and policy review schedules, and diarise planning conversations with your chair.

Take Stephen R Covey's advice and don't just spend this finite resource but invest in and review the efficiency of your practices – you'll reap the rewards. 🍀

Useful links

Get NGA's annual planner at bit.ly/NGA-annual-governance-planner and the minutes template at www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/taking-minutes

Exclusion panels are one of very few areas where those governing are expected to read a vast amount regarding an individual pupil. NGA's recent report of governance workload, as covered in the 2023 Winter edition, emphasised the growing evidence demonstrating how exclusion panels contribute significantly to governor and trustee workload, and increasingly so. This, coupled with the fact that permanent exclusions in particular are one of the most emotionally exhausting parts of governing mean that NGA's recent position change – that there must be change in the role of governing boards in exclusions – has been widely embraced.

Alternative proposals have been suggested before, but there is now a strength of feeling that appears to be far more (though not completely) universal than it was just a few years ago. The call for the introduction of a new suitably qualified and experienced independent reviewer to replace volunteer panels is gathering new traction, and while being first announced in NGA's annual address in November 2023, it was this term's Spring Leadership forums that presented an opportunity for airing a full debate.

More than 200 NGA members joined expert panellists to discuss both

the current exclusions landscape and NGA's proposals for the future. The high levels of engagement during the forum are testament to the strength of feeling on this topic – contributors spoke passionately about the need to improve exclusions procedures and ensure children and young people remain at the heart of decision-making.

Minimising exclusions

This was a unique and telling opportunity for those governing and education and sector leaders to convene to explore collaboratively the transformative impact of effective behaviour strategies on reducing exclusions. Pauline Myers, the dynamic school exclusion and pupil movement team leader at the Department for Education (DfE), kicked off the discussion by shedding light on the Department's proactive efforts. Prompted by pivotal reviews such as the Bennett (2017) and Timpson (2019) reports, the DfE is on a mission to revolutionise behaviour and exclusions guidance. The goal? To spotlight a diverse range of strategies that prioritise early intervention and

child-centric solutions, shifting the educational landscape towards inclusivity and support.

Echoing this sentiment, Iqbal Ismail, the chair of governors at Crown Hills Community College, shared a compelling case study illustrating the transformative power of holistic behaviour culture. The consistency and commitment that permeate every facet of school life were a key part of the narrative



An exclusion evolution?



Ella Colley, NGA head of content, discusses taking steps towards a fairer, more sustainable exclusion process for pupils and a less distressing one for governing boards



“Cultivating a sense of belonging within school environments not only reinforces positive behaviours but also serves as a shield against exclusionary practices”

A lack of external support

Much of the debate drew attention to an all too familiar set of challenges: pupils at risk of exclusion who are in dire need of external, specialist support that is simply, for the most part, inaccessible.

Distressing examples of deeply troubling home situations, lengthy waiting lists for mental health support, complex pictures of educational disadvantage stemming from societal and systemic issues, rising poverty levels and unmet special educational needs. The feeling was fairly conclusive – there is no sign these issues were likely to slow down any time soon.

Pressures on review panels

The discussion reflected NGA research findings: governors and trustees on exclusion review panels can struggle with the associated workload and emotional burden.

A snapshot of how exclusions equate to increased workload:

1. Additional time required outside of normal meeting schedule
2. Issues with recruitment and availability of panel members
3. An increased number of exclusions
4. Demands of training requirements and a lack of access to training
5. Problematic behaviour policy
6. Sheer volume of paperwork (evidence) and inconsistency in what is provided
7. Significant demands and stress of chairing the panel.

“I did five panels in four months; two on exclusions were both exhausting and I find they really impact me. I didn’t want to govern to send children out of the school gates looking at the floor, but with their head up looking to a bright future.”

The way forward?

Our final speaker at the forum was Ellen Lefley, a lawyer at the human rights charity JUSTICE. In 2018-19, the charity examined processes for challenging school exclusions in England. Among other innovations, the charity recommended the introduction of a suitably qualified and experienced independent reviewer. The reviewer’s report would consider whether exclusion is the only way forward and offer recommendations to the headteacher regarding reinstatement, replacing the reviewing function performed by governing board panels.

Concerns with the current process included insufficient support for governors and trustees to fulfil this role in terms of understanding complex legal duties. It was also concluded that exclusion decisions should be made in an independent way and, crucially, there should be both the perception of independence as well as it being a matter of fact. For pupils and families with limited understanding of governance, it may appear as though the panel is simply part of the workings of the school.

Whether you agree or not that this proposal is the right way forward, more boards than ever are battling levels of exclusions panels they can’t sustain. This is clearly a long-term goal with some challenges, but it would represent a big step forward toward a fairer, more sustainable system. It may also bring opportunities to improve the experience that our young people have of the exclusion process. **G**

Useful links

See all the details of Everybody on Board, including the new video, at www.inspiringgovernance.org/everyone-on-board

in uniting pupils, staff and governors to nurture positive behaviours.

Meanwhile, Olga Cara, chair of governors at St Meryl School and associate professor at UCL, delved into the profound connection between belonging and successful behaviour strategies. Olga articulated how cultivating a sense of belonging within school environments not only reinforces positive behaviours but also serves as a shield against exclusionary practices. Highlighting the detrimental impact of permanent exclusion, Olga underscored the message it sends to pupils: a stark declaration that they do not belong. This not only disrupts their educational journey but also leaves a lasting scar on their future prospects.

Why boards should talk more about relationships

Education expert and committed school governor **Bea Stevenson** describes how healthy relationships can have far-reaching results

I love governing. When I have not been on a governing board, I have really missed it. My first experience was in 1997, and I have since governed at a range of schools and been chair of a multi academy trust (MAT).

I currently chair a community primary school within a MAT. It is such a privilege - helping to ensure that every young person receives the best education possible is incredibly rewarding. One key aspect is shaping the relational nature of the organisation by influencing the PSHE and relationships policy and modelling healthy relationships as a board.

Room to build relationships

Given governing boards' statutory responsibilities, the ongoing focus on strategically driving vision while holding executive leaders to account and overseeing organisations' financial and educational performance, there seems little room for building relationships. But the Principles of Excellence in Relationship Education, curated by The Centre for Emotional Health with our partners, show that relationships are foundational to good outcomes in all these areas.

At their best, relationships help us to feel happy, healthy and secure. They can protect us from big challenges including mental and physical ill health. With the

right support in place, relationships education is an opportunity for children and young people to develop the skills they need to have healthy and reliable relationships for life.

Only by experiencing these relationships can children and young people identify and practise the same kinds of relationships in their own lives. This helps them learn to understand and regulate their emotions, behaving more appropriately. They can become more resilient and more supportive, empathic and inclusive with one another. Better relationships with peers and teachers mean they can be more receptive learners, improving future life chances.


Relationship ripples

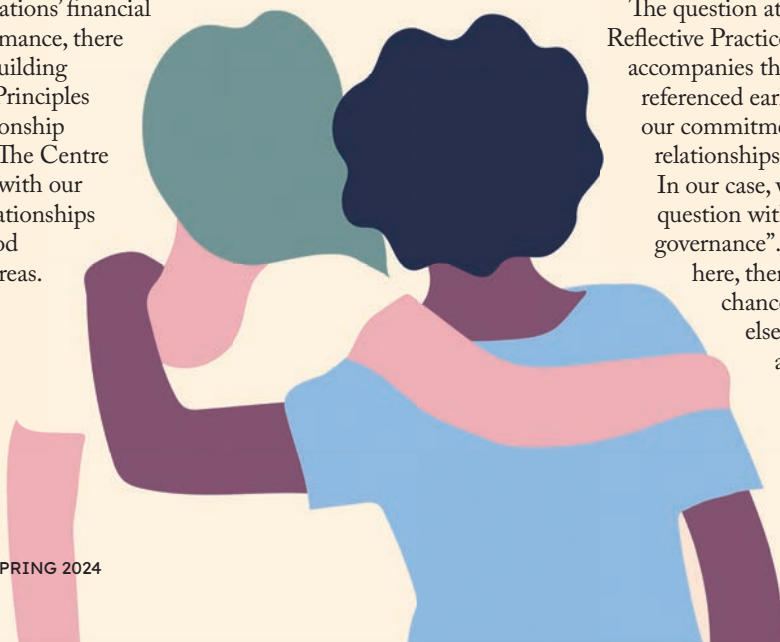
When healthy and reliable relationships are placed at the

heart of schools, the wellbeing of the whole school community is improved. A safe and open environment is the foundation for safeguarding pupils from issues such as grooming, low self-esteem and abusive relationships, and multiple risk factors for domestic violence. Pupils with positive relationships are likely to do better academically, and improved staff relationships mean higher morale and retention.

There are wider benefits for the community and society, too. Scientific evidence tells us that when educators and families role model healthy and reliable relationships, this contributes to the creation of more positive school communities. The economy also benefits from stable family units, regardless of their structure. And the empathy fostered builds a more equal, understanding and diverse society.

The question at the heart of the Reflective Practice Aid, which accompanies the principles referenced earlier, is "How is our commitment to healthy relationships integrated into..."

In our case, we finish the question with "...into school governance". If it is integrated here, then there is a strong chance it will be integrated elsewhere in the school, and in particular in the lives of the young people we serve, which is what really makes a difference. 



And this training was ‘just right’...



Paul Aber, NGA’s head of training development, explains ‘just right’ training for trustees and governors

Trustees and governors need to know what effective governance looks like and how to do it. They must also maintain their understanding of regulatory requirements and good practice as the law and guidance changes.

Most need some training to make an impact – but boards have different circumstances and needs. While good governance principles are similar across settings, the regulatory aspects of school and trust governance are different. The oversight needed on a multi academy trust (MAT) board requires different approaches to that required by a board accountable for a single school. Boards should assess what they and their members need.

Knowing what you don’t know

Working out training needs can be tricky – some people don’t like to admit what help they need, others don’t know. Yet identifying needs is easier than ever, whether it’s applying audit tools on NGA’s Knowledge Centre, accessing new online modules on Learning Link or using questionnaires and focus groups. Start by asking your governance

professional for advice.

Planning and scoping training

Boards don’t have big training budgets, so they want to spend sensibly. Sometimes, training is needed for the whole board; other times, individual members have specific needs. For example, through our Leading Governance offer, individual chairs, clerks and MAT trustees can join a programme to develop their skills and knowledge.

Sometimes bespoke is the way forward – NGA often builds support programmes for different

organisations that reflect their particular needs for the year ahead. In MATs, this might mean separate programmes for the trust board and local governance. For local authorities and other organisations, it might mean working together to create a programme of virtual sessions focused on current needs.

All training should be practical and realistic. Governors want to know what to do and how to do it so they feel empowered.

In school, context can be crucial for some sessions that move beyond compliance, looking at practical applications at board level that retain a strategic focus. And remember, whatever your training needs are, NGA either has it ready or can build around your asks! 🍷



PAUL ABER
HEAD OF
TRAINING
DEVELOPMENT

Top tips for getting your training ‘just right’

- Find out who is going to be delivering the training. Are they experienced in the governance of your setting and training?
- Don’t treat training as a nice-as-have – it’s essential. Plan it for at least a year ahead to give time to scope effectively, choose

the best options and give participants plenty of notice

- ‘Just right’ training means no longer than it needs to be – but to be effective, sometimes it’s longer than you might want!

Steps

1. Establish a sensible

2. training budget
2. Audit board and individual needs
3. Plan annually according to priorities
4. Scope training, with a third party
5. Commission fit-for-purpose impactful training
6. Promote well in advance

Three steps to policy heaven

Feeling overwhelmed by policy approval agenda items? **Ella Colley**, NGA's head of content at NGA, offers some simple steps to ease the burden

Does your heart sink when you see a meeting agenda packed with policies to approve?

Spending too much time wading through policies and getting lost in the detail can leave governors and trustees feeling that there's little opportunity to make a real difference to pupils' education.

But policies are important – they put ethos and culture into practice. We don't want to diminish the role that boards have in overseeing policies and scrutinising how they translate into everyday school life. So, how can governing boards make sure this process is managed efficiently and ensure robust oversight?

1 Do we need this policy?

Many schools and trusts have a range of non-statutory policies in place. While these may be crucial to improving outcomes for pupils, developing and implementing such policies shouldn't become an unnecessary burden for the board or for school staff. Every policy should have clear objectives; the governing board should know what the intended impact is and how it will monitor progress.

When it comes to policies that are not legally required, we

encourage boards to consider:

- What do school/trust leaders hope to achieve with this policy? Could an existing policy be extended or amended to achieve this objective?

2 Can approval be delegated?

Governing boards don't need to approve every policy. Department for Education guidance details statutory policies and who can sign them off – in many cases, approval can and should be delegated to a committee or the CEO or headteacher.

You could also think about the frequency of policy review and approval. It is recommended that many policies are reviewed annually, but this isn't appropriate for every policy and every setting. Look at what is required and consider whether extending review frequency to every two years would be beneficial.

Boards should have a level of oversight over policies they do not approve and be satisfied that they are fit for purpose. A brief summary of updates within the CEO or headteacher report



can be a good way for the board to stay informed on policies that are not subject to governing board approval without getting into too much detail.

Policy or procedure?

Some documents referred to as policies include procedures on how the principles will be carried out. These procedures are the business of school or trust staff, although governing boards do need to approve any procedure in which they will be directly involved, for example complaints or staff discipline appeals.

If you're taking a fresh look at the policies your board approves, NGA's policy review schedules offer a helpful point of reference.

To find this and other helpful resources, visit nga.org.uk and search for 'policy approval'.




ELLA COLLEY
HEAD OF CONTENT

- Who was involved? (Has expert advice been sought, and stakeholders consulted?)
- Does it comply with relevant requirements?
- Does it align with our ethos, values and vision?

The link between workload, efficiency and impact

Our research shows that, for some governors and trustees, governance is proving too time consuming. While the education sector continues to face huge challenges – stretched funding, an attendance crisis, and increasing safeguarding concerns among them – it can be easy to overlook improvements to seemingly mundane governing board practice such as policy approval.

Efficiencies in board practice cannot entirely alleviate workload pressures on those who govern, but there are opportunities to implement better ways of working for most governing boards. Those who maximise their efficiency leave more room on the agenda to discuss the strategic priorities that matter most in their school or trust.

Governance professionals should help to equip boards with an agenda that focuses on the strategic priorities and is not overwhelmed by compliance activities. Participants in NGA's recent governance workload study commented on the tick-box nature of some agendas, as well as the time spent going through policies line by line. This is unnecessary and a poor use of board time. 

3 Keep it strategic

While boards need to be assured that leaders have developed the full set of policies and sought the right advice in doing so, they are not expected to have the expert knowledge to check it themselves.

"We spend half the meeting sometimes talking ... [about the] colour of the car park lines, spelling mistakes in policies, the CEO seems to think that is what we are there for – I signed up to talk about strategy and make a difference."

Don't be tempted to draft, edit or proofread policies – this is the job of school and trust leaders.

Your role as a governor or trustee is to ask challenging questions to make sure the policy is robust. Read any policies that require approval in advance of the meeting so that you're prepared to ask questions that focus on:

- What changes have been made to the policy since it was last reviewed?
- How was the policy developed? (Has a model policy been adapted?)

ILLUSTRATION: ISTOCK

More ways to improve your board's practice

Commission an external review of governance

Reviewing board effectiveness is good practice and NGA recommends that all governing boards undertake an external review every three years.

A review may also be needed before significant change, where there is new leadership, or if specific issues around standards, financial management or complaints arise.

A review by an experienced NGA governance consultant provides an independent and objective view of your board's strengths, along with clear recommendations for improvement.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/erg to find out more and commission a review.

Get tips on efficiency and effectiveness

Our recent webinar on efficiency covered many of the issues that contribute to additional workload, providing advice on policy approval as well as board relationships, meeting practices, and ongoing development.

Visit www.nga.org.uk/governance-workload to watch the webinar on demand.

See the government guidance on policies at bit.ly/gov-stat-pol-schools

Greener Governance: taking climate action

Global warming seems unstoppable, but there is still much that boards and trusts can do, writes **Emma Knights**

For years, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the UK's Climate Change Committee have extensively documented the human race's impact on the planet.

Despite increased attention on the climate and ramped up considerations around environmental sustainability, progress isn't happening quick enough to avert future disasters. For the first time, global warming from pre-industrial times has exceeded temperatures of 1.5°C over a 12-month period.

Think global – act local

The good news is there are things boards can do. In the corporate sector there is a bit of a buzz about ESG: a focus on environment, society and governance. Progress is varied, but the emphasis is a good thing. We want ESG to be a focus in the schools and trust sector too.

Schools account for a quarter of UK public sector building emissions: tackling this will make a significant contribution to reaching net zero. School estates provide the opportunity to enhance biodiversity, help nature recover, as well as engaging children and young people in the natural

environment. One in 70 car miles are associated with the school commute – changing behaviours could create significant impact. Education plays a critical role in preparing young people for a world changed by climate, equipping them with the attitude to create a sustainable future.

Developed with experts and partners, NGA promotes the 6Cs for schools – and trusts tackling environmental sustainability: culture, campus, curriculum, careers, CPD and community.

The board's role

Get this topic on the agenda and ask: is it a strategic priority for the coming year? It is better to have a sixth priority than decide the planet has to go on the backburner while you deal

with more obviously urgent issues, which we know are many. What would stakeholders say? Have you involved pupils? Young people's voices were very much one of the spurs to our Greener Governance campaign.

Then identify sustainability leaders, both for the education dimensions and the business/premises aspects, ensuring they have time and resources to develop a climate action plan. Third, agree and monitor the plan.

Making a difference

NGA's strapline is: "We empower those in school and trust governance with valuable resources, expert support and e-learning so that pupils can flourish." There are indications that our Greener Governance work has done just that with guidance, including questions to ask, links to resources and the DfE strategy, and case studies from those leading the way.

Others of you have yet to begin these discussions. Our latest offering is a Learning Link module, which you could even consider together with senior leaders at your strategy session next term.

It is the role of the board to look outwards and lead change in the interests of our children and young people. NGA is here to help you do that. **•**



EMMA KNIGHTS
NGA CO-CHIEF
EXECUTIVE



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