Parental engagement

A governance guide for multi academy trusts

December 2024

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Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) [Academy trust governance guide](#) makes clear that trust boards are responsible for overseeing strategic relationships with parents and other stakeholders. Trust boards should ensure that systems are in place to:

- **seek and consider the views of parents**, carers and communities – helping them to understand the structure of the trust, how it operates and how they can support their child's education and put forward their views
- **listen and respond to parents** and capture how their views have informed the board's decision-making
- **communicate decisions clearly** to parents and carers

Trustees are responsible for overseeing engagement strategies across the trust and for identifying strengths, trends, patterns and opportunities for improvement.

Local academy committees engage with stakeholders, understand the local context and provide valuable insight to the trust board to help inform strategy and decision-making. Effective communication between academy committees and the trust board is essential.

This guidance was produced by the National Governance Association (NGA), in collaboration with Parentkind. It covers:

Part 1: school-level engagement with parents – benefits and effective strategies

Part 2: overseeing parental engagement – monitoring mechanisms

Throughout this guide we refer to '**parents**', meaning **anyone in a parental role**, which may include carers, stepfamilies, grandparents and others.

About Parentkind

As a national federated charity, Parentkind gives those with a parenting role a voice in education. Parentkind invest substantial resources in representing parent views on their child's learning to local, regional, and national governments and agencies.

Evidence tells us that parental participation in education benefits all children in all schools and society as a whole. Parentkind's network of 13,000 Parent Teacher Associations mobilises over 100,000 volunteer fundraisers to raise in excess of £120 million annually to fund vital equipment and services for our schools.

Parentkind's programme of support for schools includes:

- [Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools](#)
- [Parental participation training for schools](#)
- [Parent-Friendly Schools Accreditation](#)
- [The National Parent Survey](#)

[Parentkind.org](#)

1. Engagement with parents

Parental participation benefits

When parents are involved in pupils' learning there is a well-evidenced link with improved educational outcomes across a range of measures, including:

- behaviour
- self-esteem
- attendance
- risk of exclusion
- keenness to learn
- academic results
- reducing the attainment gap

Effective engagement strategies

Treating parents as partners, as experts on their children and offering opportunities for collaboration and consultation will bring schools and families together in a connected community.

School and trust leaders are responsible for developing and implementing communication and engagement mechanisms. Parentkind has identified actions that schools and trusts can consider as part of making long-lasting improvements in parental participation.

Potential actions	Considerations:
Name a lead for stakeholder participation	- A member of the trust's central team could be assigned to take the lead on parental engagement. - Trusts may also establish link roles for local governors to help monitor stakeholder engagement.
Train staff on parental participation	- Most teaching staff haven't received specific parental engagement training. - Training can help to increase confidence and could be provided 'in house' by the trust's central team or through an external provider such as Parentkind.
Create a home-school agreement and code of conduct	- Agreements can cover how to communicate with the school, social media policies and behavioural requirements on the premises. - This creates clear boundaries and expectations for parents.
Provide a forum that supports consultation and shared decision making (such as a parent council)	- Opportunities for schools (and the wider trust) to hear from parents is as important as the school/trust communicating information to parents. - The decisions and actions taken may differ from the feedback parents provide – in such cases, it is even more important that schools communicate well and demonstrate that feedback has been considered.

What Ofsted look for

Under the Education Inspection Framework, Ofsted seek to understand how schools engage with parents about the education that is provided. To help them do so, inspectors use the Parent View website, which allows parents to record their views of a school across a standard range of questions.

The results (provided enough parents have submitted responses) can be viewed at any time on the Ofsted website. Inspectors will also take into account results of any past surveys the school has carried out or commissioned.

Find out more about Ofsted inspection

Overcoming barriers

Parentkind's research shows that teachers know the value of engagement and parents want to play an active role in their child's education. However, all families have different experiences, circumstances, and needs which may impact on their capacity or willingness to engage.

- Almost half (49%) of parents say they don't have time to contribute to their child's school as much as they would like.
- 1 in 5 (20%) parents say they don't have the skills/knowledge to support their child's learning as much as they would like to.
- Almost 1 in 5 (19%) parents find the idea of getting involved in their child's school intimidating.

Effective parental participation requires a planned and sustained effort to overcome challenges, taking into account:

- parents with language and/or communication barriers
- working parents who have little funds and/or time to attend events and meetings
- parents who had a negative school experience as a child
- parents who feel they lack skills and resources to support children
- those who have not felt listened to or consulted in the past
- parents' confidence and competence with technology platforms used for communication

Parentkind's research highlights that there are also opportunities to better support teachers to ensure they have the necessary skills and confidence to form positive and productive relationships with parents.

- 5% of teachers have undertaken CPD on parental engagement
- Only 58% of teachers say they are confident engaging with parents
- 64% of teachers believe there are barriers to engaging with parents

2. Overseeing parental engagement

Trust board monitoring and oversight

Trust boards have responsibility and accountability for overseeing stakeholder engagement strategies. However, academy committees have an important role in consulting stakeholders, developing communication channels, and ensuring stakeholder views are accounted for. This means that regular communication between the trust board and local tier is essential.

Each school will know its stakeholders (pupils, parents and staff) best so it's important their views are passed on to trustees to support the development of trust-wide policies, procedures and practices that are relevant to all schools in the trust

Governance professionals provide essential support within academy trusts to develop and evaluate communication channels to ensure effective working between the layers of governance.

Trustees should consider:

- Does feedback from the local tier help trustees form an assessment of how effective stakeholder engagement strategies are across the trust?
- Is there sufficient communication between the tiers of governance to inform decision-making in a meaningful way?
- Are there any trends/patterns emerging from parental feedback across the trust, and what does this tell us about opportunities for improvement?
- Are trustees receiving information on how parental feedback is acted on where trends have emerged?

Shaping vision and strategy

Giving stakeholders a role in developing the trust's vision and strategy creates a shared sense of ownership within the trust community. Seeking views and feedback from stakeholders also helps the trust board to accurately assess how the trust is performing – an essential starting point for developing a successful strategy.

> "The strategy … draws on, and ensures, the trust's connection and responsiveness to its pupils, parents and carers, and communities it serves."
>
> **Academy trust governance guide (DfE)**

NGA's Being Strategic guidance provides further advice for boards and school leaders and a framework for collaborative strategy development.

Local tier monitoring and oversight

To establish an [effective local tier](#) that supports school improvement and strengthens trust governance, NGA recommends that academy committees are delegated responsibility for the 4Ss – **S**afeguarding, **S**tandards, **S**takeholders and **S**END. The trust's scheme of delegation should make clear where responsibility lies.

As such, a key element of the local tier's role is ensuring the needs and concerns of stakeholders are accounted for in decision-making at the local level and championing their interests at trust level.

Local monitoring methods	Approaches and benefits
Monitoring visits	• Local governor visits provide an opportunity to experience school culture first-hand and assess how the school welcomes parents.
Forums	• Forums or parent councils can provide a mechanism for seeking views and understanding areas for development.
Parent surveys	• School leaders are responsible for day-to-day communication with parents and for other operational activities like designing and implementing parent surveys. • Local governors can then evaluate responses, usually via a summary provided by the headteacher. • This should help local governors to identify areas where the school is currently doing well and areas for improvement. These insights can help local governors to provide effective support and challenge to school leaders.
Parent View website	• Run by Ofsted, this allows parents to record their views of the school and can be accessed at any time. • Survey results are available for governing boards (as well as school staff and the general public) to review.

The role of parent governors

In most cases, multi academy trusts choose to elect parent governors to local academy committees at (rather than parent trustees).

The role of a parent governor is no different to any other governor. Whilst parent governors offer a valuable parental perspective to issues being discussed, they should not act in the capacity of a parental representative. Their role should not be confused with the board's responsibility to ensure effective parental engagement.

Learn more about the [parent governor role](#).

Local governors should consider:

- What methods does the school rely on to communicate with parents?
- Are the school's methods inclusive to all parents and any additional needs they may have – how do we know? (consider parents that the school have struggled to engage)
- Does the school have clear channels that allow parents to raise informal complaints that are separate to the formal complaints procedure?
- How is the trust involving parents in developing and evaluating its strategic priorities?
- Is training provided to all members of staff to help them communicate with all parents with confidence?
- How welcoming is the school environment for parents?

Visible governance

Visible boards can increase their credibility with parents, and trusts should work proactively to help parents understand the role of the trust board and academy committees. Transparency around decision making increases the likelihood of parents 'buying in' to the trust's strategy, particularly if parents have been consulted in reaching decisions.

It can be confusing for parents to understand the different tiers of governance in a MAT, so this should be made clear on school and trust websites.

Ways to make governance more visible to stakeholders include:

- **Annual governance reports** – ideal for communicating strategic plans and reporting on progress. Ensure this is a high-level update, presented in an accessible format.
- **Termly updates** – direct communication with parents (a letter from the chair, for example).
- **Attending parents evening** – an opportunity to speak to parents and explain the board's role. 'Meet-and-greet' sessions can make governing boards feel less formal.
- **Making the most of the 'Governance' area of school websites** to help parents learn more about governors and the boards ongoing work, including success stories/impact (for example, through a blog and biographies with pictures).
- **Visiting family and community hubs** that support children, young people and their parents in the local community.

Visit NGA's Visible Governance campaign page for more ideas and actions you can take.

NGA is the national membership association for governors, trustees and governance professionals in England's state schools and trusts.

We empower those in school and trust governance with valuable resources, expert support and e-learning. Together, we're raising standards and shaping stronger governance to ensure every pupil can thrive today – and tomorrow.

nga.org.uk