

GOVERNING MATTERS

January 2022 | nga.org.uk

PUSHING BACK AGAINST POVERTY

Understanding and
supporting children
living in disadvantaged
circumstances



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OFSTED
NO NEED TO
BE AFRAID

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ANNUAL CONFERENCE
A STAR-STUDED
SPECTRUM OF SPEAKERS

30

CLIMATE CHANGE
THE BOARD'S ROLE IN
SAVING THE PLANET



**NEW
CLERKING
MODULES**
Check our website
for upcoming new
module releases

E-LEARNING ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

- INTERACTIVE
- FLEXIBLE
- AFFORDABLE
- ESSENTIAL

Access e-learning to help governors, trustees, chairs and governance professionals develop their governance skills and knowledge. With high-quality e-learning modules, and bitesize 'just in time' modules, Learning Link provides flexible e-learning anytime, anywhere.

Learning collections include: structures, roles and responsibilities; good governance; vision, ethos and strategic direction; pupil success and wellbeing; stakeholder engagement; staffing; finance; compliance; clerking and much more.

Benefits

- Over 50 e-learning modules
- CPD accreditation for all core modules and many others
- A selection of bitesize modules
- A certificate of achievement with every module
- Secure access 24 hours a day, seven days a week
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- A dedicated support service

NGA Learning Link is a cost-effective way to secure comprehensive training for governors, trustees, chairs and governance professionals on the full range of their responsibilities. Without NGA membership, NGA Learning Link is £180 per year. NGA governing board members can purchase Learning Link at discounted prices.

| Type of NGA membership | Learning Link price |
|------------------------|---------------------|
| None | £180 |
| Standard | £132 |
| GOLD | £90 |

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

Start your free trial today and preview a selection of our modules.

n|g|a| leading governance

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

Development *for* Chairs

This programme is designed for governors both aspiring to become a chair and currently working as a chair, and for trustees. The programme will support you to develop your leadership skills and runs over approximately three terms.

For cohorts starting in spring 2022, the cost of this virtual programme is £249 per participant.

Development *for* School & Trust Governance Professionals

Level 3 Certificate in the Clerking of School and Academy Governing Boards

This accredited NGA Leading Governance programme is designed for governance professionals with at least three months' experience and currently working in any school or trust setting. It helps develop the knowledge and skills needed for high-quality clerking.

The cost of the programme is £449 per participant.



JOIN NGA

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

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

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

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

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“THE ROLE OF THE PUPIL PREMIUM HAS NEVER BEEN MORE SIGNIFICANT”



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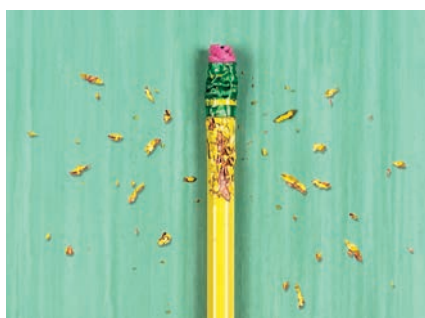
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Supporting schools to deliver excellence in computing



Computing
Quality Framework

Computing skills provide exciting career opportunities and are essential for young people's future.

But how do school leaders know if their school is on the right track to deliver outstanding computing education?

The Computing Quality Framework is a new free online tool which helps schools to review their computing provision, celebrate success, and access free support and resources.

The CQF helps school leaders to keep track of progress and recognises excellence with the Computing Quality Mark.

Progress is tracked with automated reports, helping busy teachers to save time. Developed by the National Centre for Computing Education, schools can access support for the CQF from its national network of Computing Hubs.

They can help schools to identify what support they need to deliver innovative computing provision – as well as to access the right training and resources from the NCCE.



The CQF provides:

- ✔ a process for identifying strengths and areas for development
- ✔ links to NCCE's resources, targeted to a school's specific needs
- ✔ opportunities for involvement from across the school
- ✔ accreditation with the CQF Quality Mark

Teacher John Palmer is computing lead at The Chase, Malvern, one of the first schools to receive a Computing Quality Mark.

"The CQF has allowed us to gain vital external validation of our computing provision so that we know it aligns to latest best practice. Nothing stays still for long in computing and education!"

"We have large numbers of young people taking computing at GCSE and A level, including many girls. The key to that success is the effort we put into making the KS3 computing curriculum interesting and relevant."



We love the NCCE Teach Computing Curriculum and use this in our KS3 provision.

"Review and self-evaluation is a vital part of my role. Going through the CQF in detail gave me confidence that if Ofsted undertakes a computing "Deep Dive", we're able to demonstrate our strong computing provision."

"We found the CQF process very straightforward, and its suggested areas for improvement are very useful too. Whenever I had a query, the central team have been very helpful."

"We are also an NCCE Computing Hub school offering support to schools across our region. We're working to help them also adopt the CQF as a superb way of reviewing and extending their computing provision."

**National
Centre for
Computing
Education**

Find out more at computingqualityframework.org



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

A word from the editor

Sam Henson, director of policy and information, on how hope and kindness are what we really need at this moment

Whether it's an ancient proverb, or was just said by someone wanting to feel closer to their summer holiday, the words "No matter how long winter is, spring is sure to follow" should evoke a sense of hope. It's interesting looking back on what we said in previous editions – a year ago, we were talking about greeting the spring term with optimism for recovery. Of course, we all know how 2021 played out, and the start of 2022 is not where any of us want it to be as the Omicron variant brings a new wave of trials and tribulations.

One headteacher recently told me their staff "are on their knees", while Evelyn Forde MBE, ASCL vice president, described it just before Christmas as like "being on a paddle board in choppy tidal waters. And if that doesn't sound as scary as walking a tightrope, just consider the water temperature in December."

I did some paddleboarding in the summer, in calm, warm waters, and could barely stand for more than a minute. The metaphor is hard hitting.


In her 2021 annual address, (page 18) Emma Knights spoke of three virtues most frequently mentioned during the past year from the Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education and pathfinder project: kindness, courage and optimism. On page 24, Matthew McKirgan, one of our delegates, tells us what the messages from each session meant to him, making a key observation: that everything "can be traced back to just being kind". Acts of kindness often manifest as support, a hallmark of governance duty. That support includes equipping, encouraging, celebrating and sometimes defending. One scenario that might include them all is an Ofsted inspection. As you read this, NGA's senior policy and information officer Nina

Sharma will be following up NGA's 2020 report *A View from the Board*, which gave a governance perspective on the then new Ofsted framework. If you have recently been inspected please do get in contact with Nina at nina.sharma@nga.org.uk.

Meanwhile, in this edition Ofsted has asked us to share its thoughts on dispelling myths that can heighten the anxiety induced by inspection, but this of course is only part of the story. While we want to ensure NGA is a vehicle for delivering the facts, we can't deny the unhealthy culture that exists around inspection. The sense of anticipation placed on the shoulders of leaders already dealing with the pandemic has proven too much for some. The message from NGA's annual conference was emphatic: as governance leaders, we cannot let this continue. At a time when support is needed more than ever, many of you have told us that Ofsted dominates thinking.

"The three virtues most frequently mentioned were kindness, courage and optimism"

But governance can provide that support – and as Emma's annual address proclaimed, it's time the whole sector gave more credit to governance as the most important line of accountability for schools.

Finishing with hope again, in this edition we have a number of pieces on how we can ensure disadvantaged children and young people can access the same opportunities as others. In 2022 NGA's policy and projects manager Fiona Fearon will be building on our previous Spotlight on Disadvantage campaign, and looking at a wider definition of disadvantage than poverty. If you want to help in this work, contact her at fiona.fearon@nga.org.uk. 

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OUR ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2021

Championing good governance to improve the education and wellbeing of children and young people is at NGA's heart. Our 2021 annual report of achievements shows how we meet this aim.

We provide our members – governors, trustees, governance professionals and governance support organisations across England – with expert support in many ways. The report sets out what we've done this year to provide information, advice and guidance for boards; to support your professional development; to represent the governance community and influence the national conversation; and to provide membership services so you can carry out your role well.

To deliver good governance, there are a breadth of subjects and approaches that boards need to know about. The report highlights the topics that NGA has proactively

produced and facilitated insight on over the year through our guidance and resources, events, magazine, blog, podcasts, webinars and e-learning.

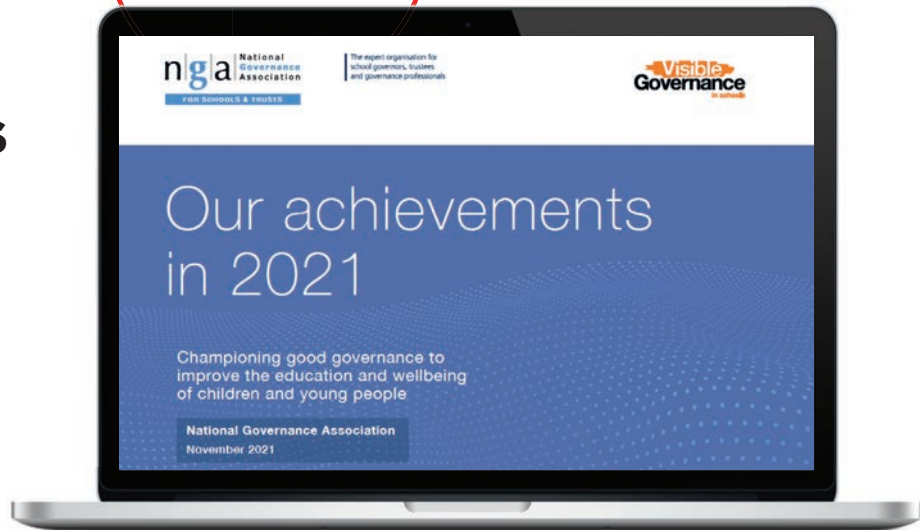
Highlights include:

- the introduction of two new membership benefits, segmented by school type – Governance Leadership Forums and Welcome to Governance LIVE
- NGA's professional

development service going from strength to strength, with NGA securing the contract to deliver the reformed National Leaders of Governance support

- significant focus over the year on equality, diversity and inclusion, governance professionals and multi academy trust governance.

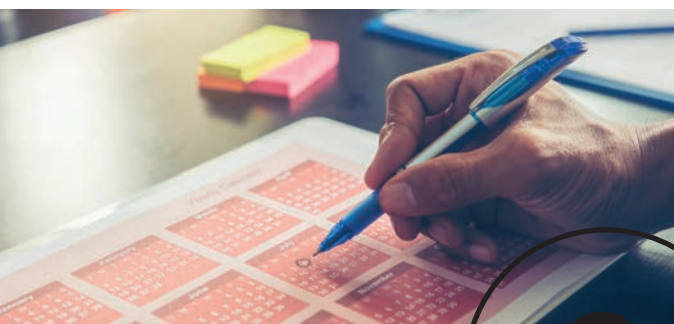
Visit www.nga.org.uk/achievements to read the report



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

We have a packed spring schedule for you this year, with a range of forums, network events, conferences and webinars to keep you up to date with the latest information, advice and guidance. We also have two regional forums this term, for members in the South East and South West.

Book your place at www.nga.org.uk/events



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| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------|
| 24 January | SAT Governance Leadership | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 31 January | Maintained Governance Leadership Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 8 February | MAT Governance Leadership Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 10 February | Local Academy Committee Governance Leadership Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 8 March | SEND Network | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 15 March | South East Regional Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 17 March | South West regional Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
| 24 March | MAT Governance Network | 4.00-6.00pm |
| 30-31 March | Governance Professional Conference | 10.00am-12.00pm |

2021

OUR YEAR

IN NUMBERS

62
new or updated
resources in
the Knowledge
Centre



65%
of boards use membership
or professional development
services

30%
increase in
Learning Link
users



235%
increase
in training
sessions
delivered to
boards

We work with **100+** local
partners to improve school
governance

1,859
GOLDline advice
queries resolved, up
14% from last year



14,602
copies of our induction
handbooks distributed

HAVE YOUR SAY

Make your voice heard in NGA's consultation on the 20 and 21 questions for board self-review. We are inviting feedback from boards that have used the long-standing questions to see how they have helped to shape and improve your practice and any views on changes that need to be made.

Downloaded almost 11,000 times since July 2019, the questions are hugely popular and are also used in NGA's Leading Governance programmes, external reviews of governance and the board self-appraisal tool.



The consultation is open until Monday 7 March 2022 at 9am. Visit www.nga.org.uk/questions-consultation to get involved

WELCOME TO GOVERNANCE LIVE - NEW DATES NOW AVAILABLE

Welcome to Governance LIVE is our newest membership benefit available to NGA GOLD and MAT trustee members. Designed for new governors and trustees, the Welcome to Governance LIVE session, taking place between 25 January and 3 February, will support you to make an impact in your first six months as a new governor or trustee.

The sessions will explore:

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



If you have new members of your board but haven't received an email from us, you can book your place at www.nga.org.uk/Welcome-to-Governance-LIVE.aspx

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

Effective continuing professional development (CPD) will bring shared benefits for individuals and governing boards alike. Skills and knowledge are key elements in ensuring a board is able to govern effectively.

The development of knowledge on various topics helps discussions to be informed, questions to be challenging and decisions to be robust. In addition, governors and trustees need to possess and develop the right skills to provide the necessary challenge and support. High-quality CPD will improve confidence and enable governors and trustees to perform to the best of their ability.

Continuous development

It may be useful to first reflect on your board's CPD culture – does it value and promote board members' continued development? It can be easy to fall into the trap of thinking that CPD should be something confined to those who are new to the board, but expectations and best practice change – so the importance attributed



SABREEN MARASHLI
NGA INFORMATION
OFFICER

to building on skills and knowledge should not wane throughout your term of office. It is important that governors and trustees continue to update their training and develop themselves.

CPD should be viewed as part of a continual process on the board, where members are proactive and consistent in furthering their development. For a board that is successful in establishing an effective CPD culture, this will be a readily identifiable aspect of its governance.

Seeking the right CPD

It is key that governing boards do not treat CPD as a tick-box exercise, and see that it goes beyond the minimum expectations. The CPD


undertaken should be done with the wider board and school development in mind. There will also be instances in which it is recommended that governors or trustees receive appropriate CPD. For example, although this is not mandatory, exclusion review panel members should receive training on exclusion legislation and proper conduct.

When determining which areas would most benefit from targeted development through CPD, boards should refer to their skills audit and school or trust improvement plan to identify gaps on the board and their organisation's strategic priorities, respectively. If you have not done so already, boards can use the NGA skills audit, which we have significantly updated this year to make it more meaningful and useful.

Key areas of responsibility, such as safeguarding, should also be prioritised.

Additionally, governors on academy committees should ensure any CPD is within its strategic remit in accordance with their trust's scheme of delegation.

The activities that make up CPD are varied, including webinars, workshops, training courses, mentoring and e-learning. We would urge members to explore our website and take advantage of the many CPD opportunities we offer.

CPD need not be expensive or time-consuming. When extra resources are required, assessments can be made on what provisions will be most effective and economical, although it is clear to see how supporting the board's development would be a worthwhile investment. 



CPD for boards

Many of those governing do so because of a desire to make a difference – but this desire must be matched with the relevant skills and knowledge, says **Sabreen Marashli**, NGA information officer



Governance professionals – a role for the future

Amy Wright, NGA clerking development manager, looks forward to how we will support governance professionals over the next year

My first anniversary as clerking development manager seems like a good time to share how NGA has, and will continue to, support governance professionals as well as the areas we will focus on in 2022.

Reporting and networking

We had a busy 2021 gathering views from governance professionals, with an amazing 1,272 responses to NGA's clerking survey. This gave us sector-leading insight into the experiences and expectations of governance professionals and was the basis for our report: *Governance Professionals: 2021 and Beyond*. We built on

this intelligence through our annual clerking and governance professional conference in March and our governance professional network. NGA has been able to use this learning to inform the wider sector, including the DfE, on how governance professional roles have evolved and what support is needed for the future.

Induction

The number of governance professionals who have never received any kind of induction training has come across loud and clear. A key area of focus has therefore been on providing training, information and guidance for those new to clerking, or who have been in



AMY WRIGHT
CLERKING
DEVELOPMENT
MANAGER


“NGA will continue to support you in 2022 through new content”

the role for some time but were never offered training.

NGA, of course, is doing its part, providing new resources specifically for governance professionals, focusing on commonly requested areas for advice. We have also included links to the guidance provided for governing boards if governors and trustees need further information. As always, we want your feedback on suggestions for improvements, articles and guidance: email clerkingmatters@nga.org.uk.

Future plan

NGA will continue to support you in 2022 through brand new Knowledge Centre content, and prioritise your development through our expanded range of Learning Link modules offering flexible professional development. And if you haven't yet joined our network of professionals to share ideas, experiences and get support, make sure you do in 2022. We will also be working with other professional organisations to produce resources, such as a handbook and career pathway guide, to help governance professionals.

Our final word is a promise: NGA will continue to address the issue of governance professionals being undervalued. NGA will campaign for a collective commitment to address deep-rooted issues such as pay, development and recognition. Without that we could lose talented and committed governance professionals from the schools sector. 



NGA Spring Term Events

Join us at an event this term to keep up to date with the latest information, advice and guidance. NGA events are a valuable tool bringing together members to share and learn from their experiences and help to shape future plans.

Spring term events

| | | |
|-------------|---|-----------------|
| 24 January | SAT Governance Leadership Forum | 4.30-6.00pm |
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| 24 March | MAT Governance Network | 4.00-6.00pm |
| 30-31 March | Governance Professional Conference | 10.00am-12.00pm |

Webinars

We have a full programme of webinars in the spring and summer terms. You can register for our latest webinars and view the recordings from our previous sessions at www.nga.org.uk/webinars

**Registration
now open**

Book your place at
NGA's upcoming
spring events.

Book your place at www.nga.org.uk/events

The importance of the relationship between schools and parents is well documented, but engaging with parents in practice and understanding its impact can make governance something truly informed by stakeholders.

In September 2021 we reintroduced stakeholder engagement as the fourth core function of governance. We highlighted that governance needs to be grounded in reality, defined by high-quality objective data and a full understanding of stakeholder views. A key part of the governing board's role is to listen and work well with all school stakeholders, and principal among these is the parent community.

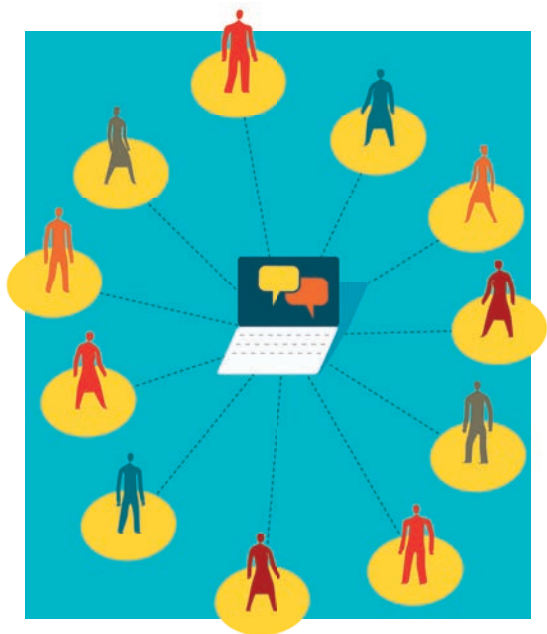
To help governing boards engage with parents directly and embed a whole-school approach, we have collaborated with Parentkind to deliver updated guidance on effective governance in engaging with parents and carers. It presents stakeholder engagement as integral to school success, and parents as key stakeholders who offer valuable insights. With this resource and support, governing boards can consider how to effectively implement policy and strategy in their schools. In so doing, they will reap the huge benefits that a diverse and engaged parent voice will bring to education, school and community life and to meeting the full potential of all young people.

The pandemic has shown the need for schools to harness parental voices in their decision-making. Both schools and parents can benefit from communication to understand parents' concerns and how schools can improve. Equally, an effective school-parent relationship can enable honesty

Parental guidance



A strong relationship between school and parents can reap mutual benefits, explains **Nina Sharma**, NGA senior policy and information officer



AN ACTIVE ROLE

Parentkind's research on the relationships between parents and schools has shown that parents want to play an active role in their children's education and make a meaningful contribution to school life. Parents want to have more of a say in decision-making, feel listened to, have their views considered and influence change. Harnessing parent voice and parent power represents huge benefits for children's outcomes, the effectiveness and capabilities of schools and the wider community.

and transparency for schools to discuss child-related concerns.

This joint guidance combines extensive knowledge on engaging with parents effectively. It is designed to prompt conversations between governing boards and school/trust leaders on developing a strong approach to engaging with parents. Ways in which governing boards can increase visibility to parents include:

- Developing the relevant area of the school/trust website
- Tasking a governor or trustee to work with the school/trust leadership team on parental participation initiatives
- Providing regular updates in parent communications or school social media
- Communicating directly with parents (such as via a termly letter) and inviting feedback
- Attending school events and speaking to parents
- Engaging and working with parent-teacher associations and parent forums. EN

 *To support this work, we would like to hear how you engage with stakeholders in your school or trust. Contact me at nina.sharma@nga.org.uk to share your views, thoughts and experiences.*

At the heart of education, and governing boards are very much at the heart of it, we are all working with one important idea in mind: that children get one chance at education. I know that's why you volunteer your time, your energy, and your skills to help schools. Your time is appreciated and as an ex-headteacher I know first-hand the value governance brings.

You will no doubt have heard that the Department for Education has removed the exemption that meant outstanding schools would not be routinely re-inspected, which has been in place for a number of years. It's a big and much-needed step for education.

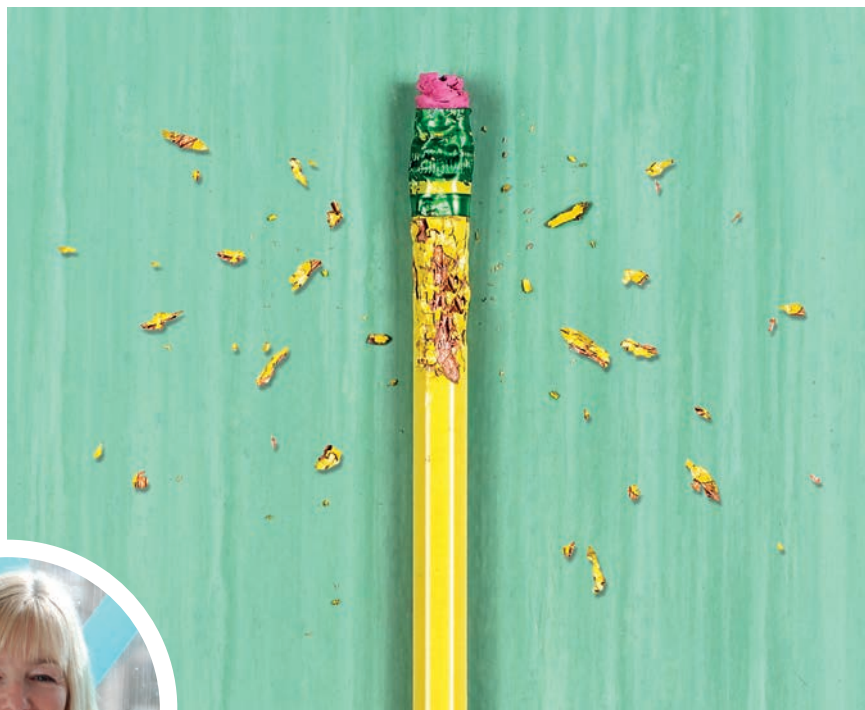
I want to stop a rumour here. We've heard the same myths that you have: that there is a quota for outstanding schools or that we have a pre-determined plan to halve the number of outstanding schools or similar. This is nonsense.

Over the past decade, schools could become outstanding and more and more did, but relatively few dropped their grade. This is because most were exempt from inspection and we only inspected those that we thought might have an issue. So, before the exemption came into place, about one in 10 schools were rated as outstanding – and in time, we expect, all things being equal, for this to rebalance again.

In the five academic years prior to the exemption being lifted, from 2015/16 to

Gill Jones, deputy director, schools and early education at Ofsted, attempts to dispel some myths and misconceptions about inspections and the inspectorate

Ofsted: don't be afraid



2019/20, we carried out nearly 1,000 inspections of exempt outstanding primary and secondary schools. The school retained its outstanding status in around one in five cases. This was to be expected because we chose schools on the basis of concerns,

such as through our statistical risk assessment process or following complaints.

A high bar

Currently, one in five schools are outstanding, but we recognise this is not a realistic reflection of the school landscape. Outstanding should

mean outstanding; it's a high bar, and for good reason. Bear this in mind when discussing Ofsted with schools; it will not help leaders and teachers if they believe a false premise – that inspectors have pre-judged the outcome and are following an agenda. We aren't; we continue to judge each school on its quality of education, behaviour and attitudes, personal development and leadership and management, including governance.

Because schools in some cases have not been inspected for 15 years, with many children going through their entire school career during this period, it meant parents were rather in the dark about how well their child's school was doing. This did not help children, staff or parents.

Since we restarted inspection in September, we're seeing a slightly different picture. Lots of schools remain outstanding while some have dropped, usually by only one grade. But some – about 20% – have now dropped to 'requires improvement', often due to quality of education in the curriculum.

The education inspection framework has helped us to have constructive discussions with schools about what is being taught, and how, and also how leaders and other staff have chosen to sequence the curriculum. It's more important than ever that children, whose education has been disrupted, are given a solid grounding to build on.

I am writing this to reassure you at a time when so much is

going on in the world. There is the concerning news regarding the Omicron COVID-19 variant, where the DfE has responded swiftly and decisively about the return of masks in schools. But also, the ever-present winter business in schools of dealing with illness, trying to keep everything on the road as usual.

No cause for worry

There is a lot of nervousness around inspection but I don't think there should be. And you can play your part in helping a school to keep Ofsted in perspective. Your school will be inspected infrequently, by someone who has been a teacher and a senior leader in a school, so they know what it's like on the ground. And on that inspection, we'll look at the quality of

education the school provides and how well children and young people respond to what's on offer.

The overwhelming

majority of the feedback we get on inspections is positive. Inspections are important for schools, for governors and trustees, parents and most of all for children, but they aren't something to be worried about.

We acknowledge the impact of COVID-19 and we want to understand how it has affected your school. Because of this, we have recently updated our deferral guidance. We consider each request for deferral carefully and look at the merits of each situation; as I write, around three quarters are being agreed to. Of course, we put children first here. But we also know that much has been asked of, and much given, by schools over the past few years. 🙏

“We judge each school on its quality of education, behaviours and attitudes”

NGA RESPONSE

NGA supports an independent inspection regime, and it's vital that inspection outcomes are as consistent as possible. A part of the quest for delivering consistency rests in all schools being subject to regular inspection.

But inspection is only one dimension of accountability – governing boards provide the first and most important line of accountability for schools. Just as COVID-19 was hitting the country, we published our *A View from the Board* report on the first term of the then new Ofsted framework, and we have continued to ask Ofsted to consider how it might improve the reports and inspection of governance.

Overall, there is a crucial role for governing boards in helping to combat the pervasive fear of 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 this strategy that there is no need to fear the consequences of an inspection. We need to help build a confident, knowledgeable, wise cadre of school leaders who look to the governing board first and foremost for their accountability.

Read more

You can read the latest on Ofsted and read *A View from the Board* at www.nga.org.uk/ofsted-guide and www.nga.org.uk/a-view-from-the-board

Coming together



Speakers at **NGA's annual conference** were full of advice and encouragement for delegates, as well as support to help governing boards face an uncertain future

Delegates were delighted to finally catch up in person

identified as the increase in collaboration and dialogue across the sector, noting that schools are “talking to parents and wider communities far more than before” which will “enrich schools and bring a new dynamic” to how they operate.

In reference to NGA's Visible Governance campaign, Zahawi extolled the mission to make governance more visible and announced his wholehearted support and the “new spirit of collaboration to source solutions”. But he also said in doing this, it was vital that boards reflect the “diversity and richness” of school communities. He stated: “We need to do more to encourage those who may not ever have considered volunteering as a governor or trustee but who still have so much to offer, who could bring a fresh perspective perhaps or a specific skill that a board really needs.”

Congratulating the winners of NGA's outstanding governance awards “as a showcase of volunteers”, he said that existing governors and trustees were the best walking advertisements for getting others to volunteer. “I urge

A MESSAGE FROM THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION

Speaking via a video address to NGA's delegates, the secretary of state for education Nadhim Zahawi celebrated “the massive contribution you make to schools” as governing boards play their role in the “joint mission of giving children the best possible start in life”. Acknowledging the “huge demands on governing boards” the education secretary called on boards to help “scale up the ambitious programme of reform to boast a world-class education system”.

He placed a focus on the need to adapt and continue to learn,

specifically against technological changes, stating “we all are learning new things and education is at the heart of our recovery agenda”.

The importance of evidence was a particular focus in his speech and he said it was key to the role of governing boards in the smooth running of schools. Zahawi specifically called for boards to “bear in mind” the need for evidence and data when making decisions. “Schools and trusts have a wealth of data – schools and boards should not be shy of making use of that data,” he added.

Zahawi celebrated what he

“Schools and trusts have a wealth of data – schools and boards should not be shy of making use of that data”

you to look at the way you advertise vacancies, use your networks to encourage others to consider becoming a governor or a trustee.”

Zahawi was full of praise for all the efforts of governing boards during the pandemic and urged attendees to “use the honours system to recognise exceptional governors and trustees”. Drawing attention to the mass move to governing virtually, he identified the “unexpected benefit” of raising attendance and participation. He called on boards to continue to maximise the benefits of a blended approach where this “works for you”.

Despite the emergence of the new Omicron COVID-19 variant, the education secretary was keen to herald a new era: “The dark age of COVID, colleagues, is drawing to a close and I think we can all look forward with far more optimism.”

He also stated that he was delighted to be working with NGA on the reformed National Leader of Governance programme and said this was essential to providing more support and guidance for boards across the country.

Leading Governance graduates with Lynn Howard, chair of the NGA Board



BIG ASK: BIG ANSWERS

At the conference, Dame Rachel De Souza reflected on the experiences and activities taking up her time during her first year as children’s commissioner for England, and NGA’s Nina Sharma was there to hear it

Since stepping into the role of children’s commissioner in 2021, Dame Rachel De Souza has made it a priority to listen to children about their lives, their future aspirations and the barriers that hold them back. The completion of the Big Ask survey has played a big role in this – gathering the views of over half a million 4-17-year-olds across England, it was the biggest survey of children this country has ever seen.

De Souza told delegates the survey showed that, regardless of ethnicity, income, gender, family structure and other characteristics, largely what children want is consistent: “a good home life, friends, and to feel well... our children are highly ambitious – they want good jobs and the support to succeed”.

Community and a sense of wellbeing

The children and young people told the survey they simply “want to be a part of something larger than themselves”. The relationship between a school and its local community has always been uniquely transformative, but the survey also suggests we need to spend more time thinking about what community means to children and young people themselves. De Souza suggested they ultimately want to be part of a community where they can play their part and develop their skills.

As well as a desire to belong, the children largely had an awareness and cared about their own mental health, and closely linked their mental wellbeing with physical health. Teenage girls in particular are twice as likely as boys to suffer from poor mental health. One notable impact on mental health stemmed from the online world and the issues around female safety.

Missing school

There is a tendency to underestimate how much school can mean to pupils – De Souza reported the majority missed school during lockdown and expressed how much they valued their teachers. A good education is increasingly recognised as a gateway to a good career in the future not

just by parents, but by young people themselves. But not everything about school was missed – exams and assessments were a key reason given for poor mental health, with even very young children aware of the impact exam grades can have on their futures. Children with special educational needs and disabilities were worried about catching up in education and the impact on their prospects beyond the school gates.

What do our children want?

De Souza stated that children simply want a chance to play, to be supported and to be given advice. The lack of opportunity to interact over the past two years and the limited resources in local communities have meant children have been unable to engage with peers.

The findings from the Big Ask have been interpreted into a strategic plan for the next five years to enable support and build services for children and families. De Souza had a simple message for governing boards: “Now that we are back in classrooms and those empty corridors are full again, you can help make life in the schools that you govern the ideal of family that so many children seem to seek in the Big Ask. Where nothing feels like a trade-off or a compromise because they are held together with places of love.”



Dame Rachel de Souza



Mandy Coalter

WORKLOAD, WELLBEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Mandy Coalter, founder of Talent Architects, delivered our second keynote of the day. With a wealth of HR experience in the education sector and beyond, she explored how governing boards can help ensure schools are a great place to work, as Sabreen Marshli, NGA information officer, explains

We all know staffing costs represent the greatest expenditure within a school’s budget, Coalter said, but she added it is a price worth paying as effective and committed staff “make the greatest difference to educational outcomes and lives”. Simply put, attracting real talent and investing in recruitment, development and retention makes a difference to the life potential of children and young people.

But, she went on, teacher workload and wellbeing remains a major barrier. Data shows one in four women aged 30-39 leave teaching, and one in five newly qualified teachers in 2015 were not in state schools two years later.

Coalter was worried by the fact that 57% of education staff would not feel comfortable disclosing unmanageable stress or poor mental health to their employer. NGA’s own annual governance survey revealed in 2021 that 77% of respondents were systematically monitoring and addressing issues relating to staff workload, wellbeing, and work-life balance. While this figure is rising, there is no reason it shouldn’t be 100%.

Framework for success

Clearly, there is some way to go to getting this

right, and Coalter presented her four pillars for making schools a great place to work:

- Leadership, culture and climate
- Developing your people and talent
- Pupil behaviour
- Manageable workload and wellbeing

For this framework to hold firm, the leadership, culture and climate pillar needs to take the weight to allow the other pillars to be constructed. This is where governing boards can have the greatest influence as they develop a culture and environment for staff to thrive.

Following a strategy

Given the value of staff, both financially and in relation to school performance, Coalter recommended schools have a written people strategy and accompanying plan in place. When measuring its impact and assessing what their organisation is like to work in, boards should receive direct feedback from staff for insight into their lived experience of working at the school.

Staff engagement is key to making this work – NGA recommends staff surveys are conducted annually or

bi-annually. This, alongside viewing data on recruitment, retention, and progression, can be used to challenge and support senior leaders.

Striving to ensure your organisation is a great place to work for all staff should always include senior leaders themselves, but NGA's survey data showed less than three quarters (73%) of schools systematically monitored and addressed issues relating to workload, wellbeing and work-life balance for executive leaders. To add to this challenge, some senior leaders are simply reluctant to accept additional support.

Cualter had some words of wisdom on this: it is essentially a matter of performance. Poor wellbeing will hinder a leader's ability to perform,

with consequent implications on how well they are able to manage staff and provide for pupils and the school community. In other words, boards need to be insistent in providing that support.

There is also the matter of the senior leader being a role model: staff should be able to see their leadership equally invested in the strategy, and pupils should be around adults who enjoy a healthy approach to mental health and wellbeing. Culture and climate will be the making of a school, and this begins at the top.

“Boards should receive direct feedback from staff for insight into their experience”



Delegates took the opportunity to put questions to speakers



Emma Knights

A BIG YEAR

In her annual conference address, NGA chief executive Emma Knights reflected on NGA keeping its promises, unveiling the big areas of focus for 2022.

NGA's had a big year, Knights stated, calling its work on ethical leadership "such a good news story" along with the increasing recognition of stakeholder engagement as the fourth core function. Equality, diversity and inclusion has been top priority, she went on, but "there is much more to do, including ensuring equalities, diversity and inclusion among our professional leaders too".

NGA has also been supporting boards to be good employers through staff CPD and she called on the governance community to not "lose sight of the centrality of resourcing CPD... education is a people business and outcomes for pupils rely heavily on it".

The past year was also a big one in terms of our focus on MAT governance, and Knights was

proud that NGA encouraged the development of community MATs and maintained federations at a time when other organisations followed ministers' leads and promoted school autonomy. We will keep striving to be at the forefront of sector-wide thinking, she promised, and we have many tools at our disposal to inform that thinking, she added.

Knights discussed common flaws our consultancy teams find in MAT governance, including the lack of investment in governance professionals, lack of training, overcomplicated structures,

longstanding incumbents on trust boards, straying into the operational and the lack of external reviews.

There were also some reassuring words on accountability;

She called on boards to take up a bigger role to help combat the pervasive fear of Ofsted and warned against adding to it, stating that "governing boards provide the first and most important line of accountability for schools."

Knights also announced NGA's priority themes for 2022:

"We will keep striving to be at the forefront of sector-wide thinking and have many tools to inform that"



Greener Governance

NGA's Greener Governance campaign has got off to a very positive start, but Knights urged delegates to do more: "We cannot expect young people – to be the saviours of the universe; we cannot leave them to sink into a quagmire of despair while we shuffle off our mortal coils." There was a call for boards to take the Greener Governance pledge and a promise that it will feature heavily in our spring term activities, including in the Governance Leadership Forums.



Pupil wellbeing

Our annual governance survey showed pupil wellbeing at the top of your list of concerns, and Knights was keen to point out we are stronger if we work together as a sector on this: "Adding the governance voice... and collaboration can make a difference ... bringing the issues of how young people are being let down by the lack of services on offer to the attention of your MP is critically important." NGA is drawing on other organisations' expertise on pupil mental health and there is much on offer. Well Schools is bringing many of them together, sharing resources and offering a whole-organisation approach.



Leadership development

There are signs that we may be entering an era when more leaders depart. Knights asked boards to create cultures that support work-life balance "not foregoing challenge, but getting the balance right, the tone right – that is at the heart of good governance". She concluded by extolling the power and worth of governance at a time of further change. "There is one thing that tends to unite those who govern – and that is about the importance of place... you volunteer to put something back into your community. You know that place; and that improves your ability to make good decisions. You are the epitome of civic engagement."

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Education through the lens of poverty

NGA's **Fiona Fearon** invites governing boards to look at the ways in which they can open up opportunity to those children and families struggling financially

For many of those who celebrate it, the Christmas season is an opportunity to spend time with family and friends, share gifts, indulge in lots of nice food guilt-free and soak up the excitement of the festive atmosphere. But for those living in poverty it can bring significant stress and financial pressure.

Last year, Save the Children reported that 60% of families on Universal Credit and Child Tax Credit said they would go into debt over the Christmas period, with parents feeling 'ashamed', 'depressed' and 'failures' as they struggled to buy their children presents.

In the UK, 4.3 million children – 31% of the country's young people – were living in poverty in 2019-20. It's thought this figure will have risen following the pandemic's impact on jobs and recent removal of the benefits uplift.

So, what does this mean for your school or trust? To put those figures in perspective, an average of nine pupils in a classroom of 30 will be living in poverty and for every one of them there will be a very real story. Many schools find that

post-Christmas is one of the busiest times for safeguarding, wellbeing and mental health concerns. While these are not all related to poverty, financial strain on families does affect the instigating factors.

The governing board's role in supporting pupil wellbeing cannot be underplayed. Setting an ethos of mutual care and ensuring school policies, procedures, practices and decisions are taken in the interests of pupil wellbeing are key.

Attainment gap

A well-documented symptom of poverty in schools is the disproportionate gap in attainment between poorer children and their peers, with the UK having one of the largest such gaps in the developed world. It would be highly undesirable to exacerbate this through barriers presented by the school or trust itself. Let's examine some of those potential barriers and their impact before looking at advice from the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) about how boards can support their school/trust leaders in



FIONA FEARON
NGA POLICY AND
PROJECTS MANAGER

removing them (see pages 24-26).

School food has been a hot topic in recent months, with the pandemic shining a light on the longstanding social injustice of food poverty. With pupils spending 190 days of the year at school, what they eat there is incredibly important. Aside from the physical



Pupil premium potential

Professor Becky Francis, CEO of the Education Endowment Foundation, on how to make the most of pupil premium funding to create the greatest difference

Giving every young person the best start in life, whatever their background and wherever they come from, is a mission that unites those of us working in schools. The pupil premium is arguably the one government policy introduced in recent decades that is most aligned to this commitment. Since 2010, it's helped sharpen the focus on improving outcomes for the most disadvantaged pupils. By recognising the stubborn link between family income and education outcomes, it's allowed schools to target additional resources at those pupils who need it most.

As we continue our efforts to support education recovery, the role of the pupil premium has never been more significant. We know that students eligible for this funding are more likely to be facing bigger challenges than their classmates. The pupil premium – and the additional resources paid to schools

through the recovery premium – is a tool with the potential to make an important difference in mitigating the long-term impact of the pandemic on disadvantaged pupils' learning. There is a clear need to make sure that every pound is spent in ways that will make the biggest difference.

While it is school leaders that decide how to use pupil premium funding to meet their pupils' needs, governing boards have an important role to play in understanding how their school is spending its resources – including pupil premium funding – and ensuring it is used in the most effective ways possible. It is the governing board that has ultimate accountability for how the pupil premium is spent. It also plays an important role in demonstrating the impact on eligible pupils.

Consider the evidence
One of the strengths of the



In 2020, 69% of school leaders said they made use of the EEF's teaching and learning toolkit when allocating funds

pupil premium is that it focuses the conversation not only on the amount of money spent on the poorest young people, but how those funds are spent too. We're well equipped to do this. Schools in England are now some of the most evidence-informed in the world, with teachers consistently using evidence when making pupil premium decisions. For instance, in 2020, 69% of school leaders said they made use of the Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF's) Teaching and Learning Toolkit when making choices about how best to allocate funds to support their disadvantaged pupils.

We've also seen a growing appetite from school governors and trustees to become more evidence-informed, and the EEF has published resources to support this. This is good news:



evidence has the power to improve outcomes for children, particularly when it comes to pupil premium spending. It can guide schools towards practices and programmes that have proven to be effective in other classrooms.

An updated reporting template from the Department for Education (DfE) has made the link between evidence and pupil premium spending even more explicit, by asking schools to make reference to the evidence they have considered when developing their pupil premium strategy.

Not a tick-box exercise

Ensuring that decisions are informed by a range of evidence is a useful maxim for governors and trustees, but also, potentially, a risk. How do we make sure that evidence empowers school leaders and teachers to make effective decisions, rather than becoming a 'tick-box' reporting requirement?

To support this, the EEF has published an updated guide for schools on pupil premium spending. While primarily

aimed at school leaders, it also has important messages for governing boards. It builds on our tiered approach to school improvement, which encourages schools to prioritise teaching quality, alongside targeted academic support, and wider strategies (such as focusing on pupil attendance). It also offers a new four-step cycle to support school leaders to develop, implement and monitor an evidence-informed approach to their pupil premium strategy. In response to the DfE's new requirement for backing up spending decisions with evidence, it also includes new support for schools to engage critically with evidence from a range of sources.

We want to encourage governors and trustees to engage effectively with evidence by challenging claims made by external providers. This means questioning whether approaches have been evaluated and critically assessing whether the evaluation is rigorous, or proves a similar match to their school context.

It complements NGA's own pupil premium guide for governing boards, which offers specific and actionable advice on how governors and trustees can support their school's pupil premium spending, and guidance on how they can monitor and be accountable for school spending.

Crucially, governors and trustees should try to understand how and why their school has made specific decisions on pupil premium


strategy. Useful questions to think about include:

- What are the current challenges and attainment gaps for pupil premium eligible pupils in your school?
- What specific outcome is your school hoping to achieve by adopting approaches or programmes?
- What does the evidence say about how effective these approaches are likely to be?
- How will your school monitor the impact of its strategy?

Governing boards should also make sure their school presents information on its website on how pupil premium funding is being spent and its impact.

Premium optimism

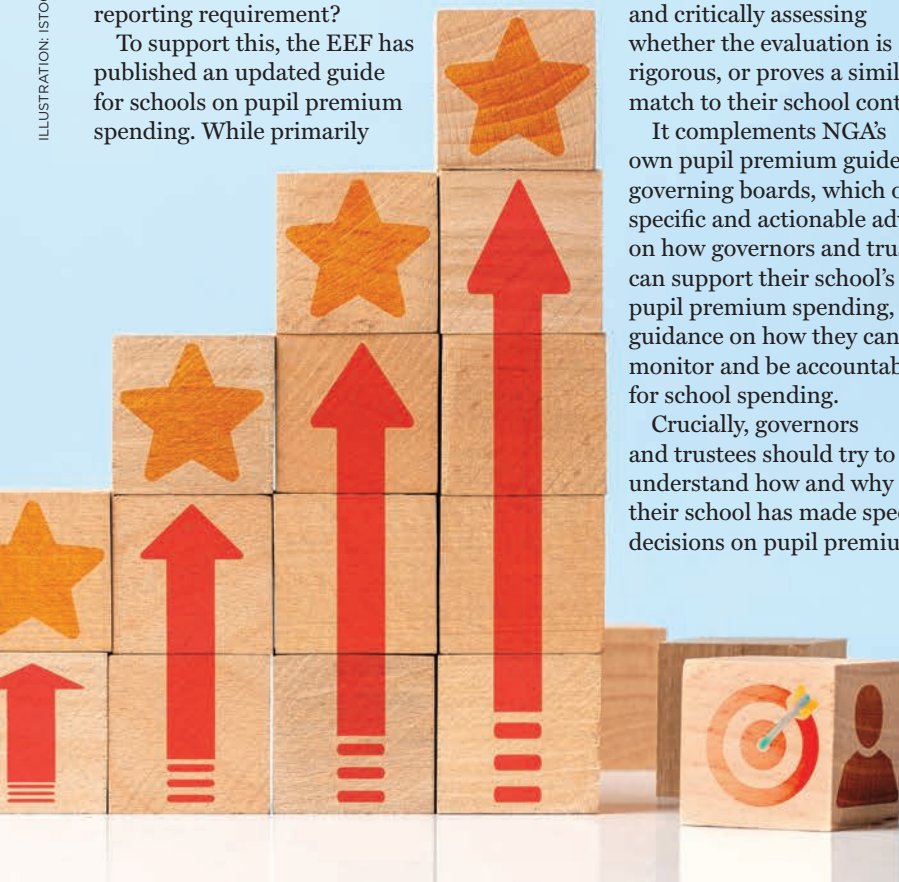
Perhaps most importantly, we should view the pupil premium with optimism. Education recovery is one of the toughest challenges our school system has faced. But, used with care and commitment – and in conjunction with critical engagement with the evidence – the pupil premium is one of the best bets we have for addressing this and giving every young person the start in life they deserve.

Governing boards have an important role to play in this by supporting their school, offering challenges and ensuring the pupil premium has the biggest possible impact on pupil outcomes. Our hope is that our new guide, and NGA's own resources, offer practical starting points for boards seeking to maximise the impact of their school's pupil premium spending. 



More information

You can find the EEF's resources at: bit.ly/EEFGuide



Unravelling the price of poverty



FIONA FEARON
POLICY AND
PROJECTS MANAGER

NGA's policy and projects manager Fiona Fearon speaks to **Kate Anstey**, project lead, and **Georgina Burt**, England development manager at the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), to address the real scale of poverty among children in England today.

Even before the pandemic, there was a growing concern that more children were suffering under an increasing weight of poverty. During the past two years, many governing boards have continued to express fear regarding the outlook for our poorest children.

Fiona Fearon: Tell us a bit about the Child Poverty Action Group and what you do.

Kate Anstey: We are predominantly a campaigning charity that works on behalf of children growing up in poverty. We carry out research to understand the causes and consequences of poverty – particularly child poverty – look at solutions and share that evidence and information with a

range of audiences, and campaign on these issues.

Georgina Burt: We are looking at these links through The Cost of the School Day project, working in partnership with an organisation called Children Northeast to work with whole school communities to identify and reduce some of the cost barriers that children and families face when accessing school. Linked to that, we also do training for staff, governors and trustees around child poverty and school costs as well as some of the practical things that can be done to address this.

FF: What specifically are some of those financial barriers? And how might governors and trustees be able to ensure that their schools and trusts aren't

inadvertently allowing these barriers to exist?

KA: Uniform is one of the significant cost barriers for families that we should be looking at, especially now with the new DfE guidance. The cost varies, but can be hundreds of pounds for many – and that goes up, particularly when you see lots of branded items and long compulsory lists of things that families have to buy. Not having the right uniform, such as PE kits or outdoor clothing, can mean children are not able to participate fully in some activities. That has a knock-on effect on children's outcomes and means they miss out on some of those learning experiences that their better-off peers are able to participate in.



We have resources, called The Right Blazer, for schools who are now thinking about their uniform policies and their pre-loved uniform provision. We encourage schools to take a look as it promotes cheaper and more eco-friendly alternatives to accessing uniform.

GB: There are lots of additional hidden costs associated with children attending schools in England, such as trips and clubs, and resources such as stationery, revision guides, music lessons, food technology ingredients, and so on.

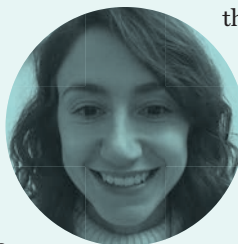
The starting point is for governors and trustees to understand what it costs families for pupils to fully participate in everything that their school has on offer and then ask where those costs can be reduced. We have a great resource to support governing boards in looking at this, called The Cost of the School Day Calendar; it gets to the essence of making the school day more equitable, more inclusive for everybody, helping a larger group of families that sit outside of the thresholds for pupil premium but might still be experiencing poverty.

KA: In relation to school food, we've heard cases of children on free school meals (FSM) having to take cheaper and sometimes more unhealthy options, but also about children living in poverty not entitled to FSM being restricted. It's important to look at how the whole school food system is administered and what children are getting for their money, making sure it's inclusive for all.

FF: Are there ways that children can be identified

who are not eligible for pupil premium, but living in poverty?

GB: CPAG has found that there are 900,000 children in England living in poverty but aren't eligible for FSM. As a governor, I would want to know how confident are we as a school team that everybody who is eligible for FSM is identified and signed up. Do parents know what support is available, and how do we know this? Are we promoting other types of support linked to FSM, such as the holiday programme, winter grants etc? So, it's not just promoting FSM,



Kate Anstey

but promoting other types of support that might help to identify families too.

We saw this over the pandemic with the voucher system: FSM numbers increased,

partially because the level of need increased in those that were eligible, but also because there was a greater awareness of what was available. This also has an effect on the amount of pupil premium a school receives to better

support their pupils. I would also suggest governors and trustees explore the level of awareness of poverty and its consequences among the whole school staff team. It might be the case that the catering team notices that a child regularly doesn't have enough money on their lunch account; office staff and teachers may notice something as the first point of contact too. Do we know that our staff are able to identify signs that suggest that a family might be struggling financially?

KA: We find that although schools are aware of their context and

their pupils' families, they are still surprised by the scale of child poverty and how many children it affects. We're talking about an average nine in a classroom of 30, but in many classrooms, it's much higher than that. Through the training we deliver, we try to unpick poverty, particularly in the school's local community. What are the key drivers of poverty and what do they mean for families? We also talk about attitudes and perceptions of poverty. It's also a really good opportunity to think about some of the good practice being implemented in your school.

Schools often shoulder the burden of a stretched social care system and at times are trying to plug the gaps. What should governing boards know about avenues of external support that should be available to schools? What should a school do if those avenues of school support are inadequate?

GB: As a safeguarding and pupil premium link governor, I not only look at what the school is doing, but also data on food bank referrals, the number of children who have accessed the nurture provision over the last half term, etc. Has there been a shift in the need compared with the previous year? I use that data to inform strategy and decision-making, and support the school in looking for those external sources of funding when patterns are identified, so there are some practical ways without getting too involved operationally. The last thing

I think is really important is thanking school leaders and staff, recognising that all the work put in behind that data. 🍷

“There are 900,000 children living in poverty but not eligible for free school meals”



Georgina Burt

More information
To find out more, visit cpag.org.uk

There was a shocking statistic from Rachel de Souza – that 20% of nine- to 17-year-olds say they are unhappy. That's five or six children in every classroom. Those children may be physically present, but they aren't going to be in the mindset to learn.

After I heard this, two questions came to mind: what would make them feel better, and how will this affect their goals long term? The children surveyed also said they simply wanted to play and to be part of something bigger than themselves. This stood out as something I have seen in my school – especially since lockdown, when pupils were distanced and those connections were missing. Participation in extra-curricular activity has gone through the roof.

At my next full governing board meeting, I will report back on this and encourage each of our committees to look at it in more detail – how is play and connection integrated into our culture? Does the school day give opportunities for pupils to experience this?

Employer brand was an element of Mandy Coalter's session. Although I'm not a fan of the term, this is an area I feel has not been given as much attention as it should – the education job market is as competitive as any other.

We often 'sell' schools on the learning environment and the culture for pupils, but we need to consider the working environment as well. Thinking about the future, this session helped me to consider how the board needs to prepare for challenges on the horizon, such as when we need to recruit to the senior leadership team. If we take the time now

Conference takeaways

Matthew McKirgan shares how he will use learning from NGA's annual conference in his governance role at a maintained secondary school in West Yorkshire



pandemic we have had limited opportunities to engage with pupils and staff to genuinely ask them how they are feeling, what they need and want.

It's so important for us to get back into this – even if it means being open to hearing some uncomfortable views, and acknowledging and addressing them.

Ethical leadership sounds quite a heavy subject, but simple values of kindness, courage and optimism are present in all schools. Everything talked about in Rachel's and Mandy's sessions, as well as in Emma Knights' annual address, can be traced back to just being kind. It underpins pupil and staff wellbeing.

When we talk about being inclusive, encouraging individuality and a restorative culture, we simply mean to 'be kind'. This resonated strongly with me, and when the time comes to review our vision for the school, I will champion how we can exploit the idea of kindness. It can easily be considered something soft and woolly that doesn't need to be made explicit, but it goes to the heart of who we want to be. 🧡

to think strategically about our employer brand when it's not a big issue, we'll be ahead of the game when the time comes.

There was a clear message across the conference on the need for governing boards to have more direct dialogue with stakeholders – we receive a lot of reports, but we also need to make sure we are triangulating what we read. During the



20% of nine- to 17-year-olds say they are unhappy. That's five or six children in every classroom



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"Our consultant had a friendly, collaborative style overlaying a formidable intellect, which was a brilliant combination. We worked very closely with them throughout and can't think how they could improve."



Sustainable ambition

The DfE's draft strategy looks to significantly reduce the environmental impact of education, and increase awareness and knowledge, explains DfE's Sustainability and Climate Change Unit

At the COP26 climate conference in November 2021, the secretary of state for education Nadhim Zahawi announced a draft Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy. This set out an ambitious vision for the UK's education sector to be world-leading in sustainability and climate change by 2030. The strategy outlines action areas to achieve this vision in England: education; skills; the education estate; operations and supply chains; and the use of data.

The draft strategy recognises the critical role education plays in tackling the climate crisis and enhancing biodiversity. It also affirms that success will require a cross-government effort and collaboration between the Department for Education (DfE) and the education sector.

The draft contains some key announcements for schools: the commitment that new school buildings not already contracted will be net zero in operation, meaning that they will be highly energy efficient and powered from on-site and/or off-site renewable energy sources; increased training and support for teachers; and two nature-based initiatives – a National Education Nature Park and Climate Leaders Award.

The National Education Nature Park seeks to use the vast amount of educational land in the UK to increase biodiversity, while providing opportunities for young people to learn about nature; monitor the impact of their actions; and develop critical numeracy and data science skills.

Both the National Education Nature Park and Climate Leaders Award will inspire young people from all backgrounds to develop their skills and knowledge in biodiversity and sustainability, and

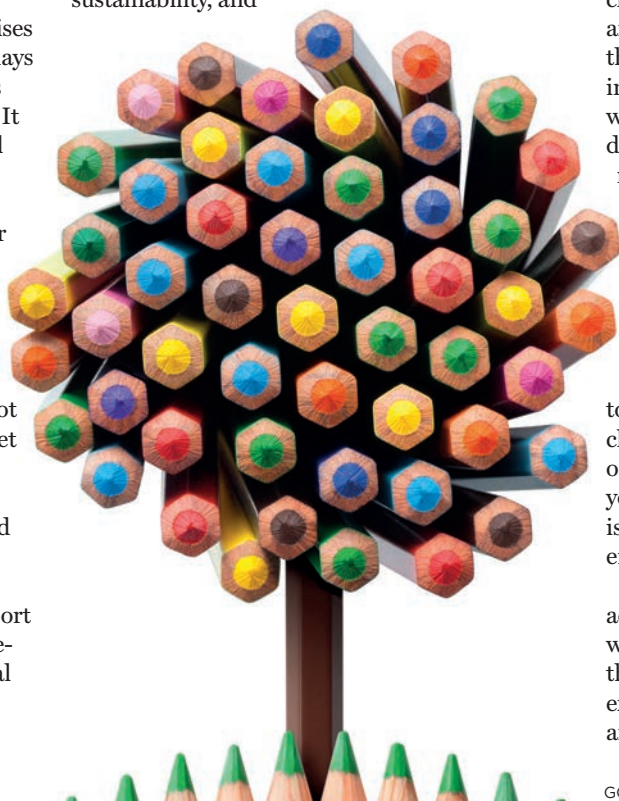
celebrate and recognise their work in protecting the local environment.

Over the next few months, ahead of the planned publication of the final strategy in April 2022, the Sustainability and Climate Change Unit in the DfE are running a series of user and working groups to explore where the strategy could be developed and how they can work with others for maximum impact.

One such area is sustainability and climate change leadership in schools, and the DfE is keen to explore the role of school governance in this approach. Having a whole-school approach to decarbonisation and climate resilience will provide the greatest opportunities for young people to contextualise their learning and see sustainability in action.

The DfE has also demonstrated its commitment to engage with young people on climate action and, following on from joint events with youth organisations at COP26, is setting up a youth panel to engage on the strategy.

The draft strategy acknowledges the excellent work in many schools, and the DfE is keen to share examples of good practice and innovation. 🌱





For some governors and trustees, drawing on their professional expertise is a regular and important part of the role. When you are a climate scientist, like I am, it happens a bit less frequently. That's one of the reasons I'm so delighted to be able to write an article on our recent work on climate in the classroom and how you might get involved.

First, a quick introduction: my name is professor Andrew Charlton-Perez (but you can forget the professor bit) and I have the twin good fortunes to be both head of the School of Mathematical, Physical and Computational Sciences at the University of Reading, and the chair of governors of Radstock Primary School in Earley, Reading.

Preparing for an uncertain future

Being the head of school for three brilliant departments at a major research university involves quite a lot of leadership and management, but at heart I still think of

myself as a meteorologist, someone who has a love for understanding what makes the climate system work. Throughout my professional career I've been a member of the world-renowned Department of Meteorology at the university. Our climate change work is known all over the world; the university was recently awarded a Queen's Anniversary Prize, the highest honour for a UK university, for this work.

As well as my own research and teaching, another thing that really motivates me is making sure young people understand more about climate change. It's so vital that our young people, the generation whose lives will be shaped by climate change, know more about how climate works, how we know it's changing, what this means for them and what they can do about it. At Radstock, climate change is part of our aim of 'preparing for an uncertain future'.

We all know that young people are passionate about better climate education; at Radstock we have seen them advocate powerfully for this at an online mock climate meeting they themselves organised at the end of 2020, and at the recent COP26 climate conference in Glasgow. At the university, we took inspiration from this to think about how we could help to make better climate education a reality for all young people in the UK.

Climate in the classroom

Climate scientist by day and chair of governors by night **Andrew Charlton-Perez** describes how governing boards have a crucial role to play in climate education

Climate lottery

In September, we organised the first national climate education summit. Our aim was to bring together a diverse range of people and voices to talk about what actions were needed to make real change. We did a lot of talking and meeting people. There are no shortage of brilliant people and organisations around the UK trying hard to make better climate education a reality.

There are also some amazing schools and multi academy trusts who put climate and sustainability at the heart of everything they do. Sadly though, climate education is a lottery. As a young person you might go to a school that has confident, knowledgeable teachers who can bring climate into lessons as diverse as business studies and food science. For far too many young people though, this isn't the case. That's not the fault of teachers or school leaders; as a governor, I know how hard schools work. National surveys show teachers want change, but lack the confidence and training to make it happen.

At the summit we learned



a few important things. Firstly, the young people working hard on climate are brilliant – clear, concise, and well informed. The two young people who spoke at our summit, Josh Tregale and Serena Bashal, made a powerful case for the need for their generation to have better climate education and for this to be woven, in Josh's words, as a golden thread throughout their school lives.

Second, the change needed here is of such magnitude that we need everyone on board. This is a challenge that, despite all the others that schools face, just can't wait. We were delighted that the partners we brought together at the summit made joint commitments to develop and deliver a national action plan for climate education, including NGA. You can find our action plan at bit.ly/ReadingUniClimateEducation. 🌱



We would be delighted to hear views from governors and schools on our strategy and welcome further partnerships. Contact us at climateeducation@reading.ac.uk

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

So what can governors and trustees do to help make this change happen?

1 Get your governing board to train staff on climate change. It is such a huge topic that it is not only young people who feel anxiety about it. NGA and others are developing brilliant resources for governors and trustees to make this easier. Climate change is here and unequivocally due to human activity, but we can do something about it, both to mitigate its effects and to prepare for the climate impacts that will happen. For governing boards as for young people, knowledge is power.

2 Help empower your school to improve climate teaching. We all know teachers and schools are stretched, but that's exactly why governing boards need to help them find time and permission to incorporate teaching about climate into and beyond the school day.

3 Think about your school's emissions and appoint a climate lead on your governing board. Radstock is

proud to have signed up to the letszero.org campaign and is working with sustainability charity Ashden and our local authority to reduce our carbon footprint through targeted investment in our buildings and school travel.

4 Join with us. As parts of the action plan are developed, we want to work closely with schools to ensure they have a broad reach. One example is our plan to get more climate professionals engaged with schools and education. Watch out for an exciting announcement about this soon, and encourage your school to take advantage of the offer to talk to actual climate professionals.

While climate change itself is incredibly worrying, this is an exciting time for climate education. We were delighted to support the new draft strategy of the Department for Education. View the strategy at: bit.ly/DfEClimateStrategy



Join NGA's Greener Governance pledge to:

- reduce carbon at your school or trust
- put your school or trust's contribution to environmental sustainability on the agenda
- ensure a climate action plan is developed to make this happen in 2022.

Greener Governance
in schools and trusts

nnga National Governance Association

As local leaders, governors and trustees have an important role in taking forward COP26 targets. Join NGA this year for our latest governance leadership forums centred on Greener Governance. At our forums we will hear from schools that have begun work on sustainability as well as feeding back to the Department for Education on its draft sustainability and climate change strategy before its final strategy is published in April. The forums will enable you to network, share experiences and discuss plans with those governing and leading schools in similar situations. To book your place, see nga.org.uk/events



Who are you?

Establishing your organisational identity as a multi academy trust puts you on a firmer foundation, says NGA's **Sam Henson**

We identified 11 key issues in our original multi academy trust (MAT) governance report, *Moving MATs Forward*, in 2019. One was organisational identity; we identified that failure to understand MATs as single organisations had been one of the major hurdles for the MAT system since its inception. This is still a prevalent issue and one with governance at its heart.

Strong MAT governance relies on the organisation knowing who and what it is. Time has shown that a sense of persistent fragmented identity can prevent the governance

and executive structures from working together and stall a trust's development journey.

The misconception persists that MATs are collaborative partnerships rather than single organisations with schools formally joined together through a single governance structure. This can prevent trust boards from creating and indeed realising a singular vision for the trust, negating organisational integrity in the process. A 'broken record' technique needs to be applied to get the message across throughout the sector, applying the mantra of 'one organisation,



SAM HENSON
DIRECTOR OF POLICY
AND INFORMATION

one trust, one overall vision' at every opportunity.

Our 2021 governance survey revealed just 60% of local governors in academy committees said their school feels part of one organisation, down from 62% in 2019.

A remaining challenge is to address distrust from some local communities that view MATs through a corporate lens, which adds significantly to the problem of bringing potentially very different school characters together under the banner of a single trust. Perhaps the obvious answer is to use community voices to spread the word.

The local tier offers MATs a legitimate way to establish themselves as community players that can achieve local buy-in and maximise the impact of organisational power without falling into corporate machine territory. The local tier can be instrumental in securing alignment to the trust's identity while preventing the character of the school itself from being extinguished.

The reality is schools want to protect their individual character. A research report published by the DfE in November 2021 on the benefits and obstacles of joining a MAT showed that 77% of schools were concerned about losing their identity. The research illustrated schools' concerns that they would be forced to take on a 'homogeneous' identity that would threaten the individual traditions and heritage valued by their communities.

Don't neglect identity

Since the 1980s, researchers have observed that managing organisational identity is often neglected until an organisation reaches a point where it is unavoidable, such as when it experiences significant growth, downsizing, or has fostered multiple identities that have become irreconcilable.

In 2018, NGA's own MAT case studies found a pattern when trusts forge a collective identity retrospectively. We also found common reasons why MATs created a single organisational identity once the lack of one had proven to be an issue, including:

- challenging biases
- embracing change
- wanting to get to the bottom of what the trust stands for
- increasing buy-in from schools

This says a lot about identity but clearly relies on getting communication right. One



Just 60% of local governors in academy committees said their school feels part of one organisation in 2021

area that needs careful consideration is the role of increased centralisation within MATs, which has provoked fierce debate in the past.

But recently the benefits of a centralised approach have gained more traction.

Some trusts have shown it is possible to retain and promote the individual character of schools, with locality being clearly seen and understood by the central trust team and board, at the same time as a more centralised approach has been adopted to strengthen trust-wide identity. The approach to MAT finance is a good example, with more trusts moving to a centralised or General Annual Grant pooling approach in recognition that this can further cement a 'one trust' way of operating.


MAT trustees are key to maximising trust-wide acceptance of what a MAT thinks it is, specifically the two sides of the role: as charity trustees and as company directors. As charity trustees, they need to ensure the charity is accountable to members, beneficiaries and the public that funds the trust. Delivering real accountability will help ensure that organisational identity is rooted firmly in the hearts and minds of the people that matter most to the trust.

As company directors, MAT trustees provide a creative contribution to independent oversight, which includes making decisions for the good of company and stakeholders. It's not possible to do that if you don't know what

stakeholders think and need. Making stakeholders part of the governance model – such as having a real community presence within the local tier – means you are going beyond engagement and allowing the community's influence to filter into board decision-making.

Adapt to context

The approach trusts take to MAT governance is an expression of intent, identity and what they value. But changes in context can sometimes come as a surprise even to the most forward-thinking trust – just look at the pandemic. Being able to adapt in line with that context is important to maintaining both the governance structure's integrity and the uniqueness of your trust. Adaptation is not a sign of failure but recognition of the need to be responsive to changing circumstances. Sometimes that means things rooted in the trust's identity, such as vision or the way you do governance, need to change. That doesn't need to be a threat to the one-trust mentality, it can be an opportunity – a time to reinforce, as long as the voices of each layer are being heard.

Delegation will be key; used well, it can be a powerful tool for transparency and a key way to enhance strategic working. But that will only happen if it keeps pace with change, and continues to reflect the realities of your structure. Done wrong, it could confuse and lose trust among key stakeholders, working against establishing trust-wide understanding of your organisation's identity. 

“It is entirely possible to retain and promote the individual character of schools”



More information

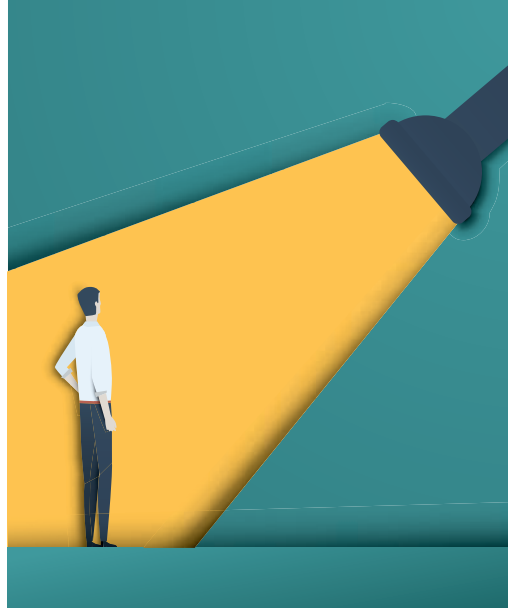
To read the *Moving MATs Forward* report, visit bit.ly/MMFReport

How do you know whether your board is working well? Having an external review of governance (ERG) every three years is good practice. The Department for Education (DfE) and the Education Skills and Funding Agency's (ESFA's) Academy Trust Handbook recommends ERGs: the ESFA's "strong preference is that external reviews of governance are also conducted routinely as part of a wider programme of self-assessment and improvement".

An annual self-review between ERGs should be part of the board's plan, and this needs to be proportionate and impactful. Board self-reviews are not a newfangled idea, an extra request or a tick-box exercise; they are part and parcel of good governance. What's more, the schools sector has had an easy-to-use resource for a decade.

2022 marks 10 years since the '20 questions for a governing board to ask itself' were published under the auspices of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership alongside The Key. Discussions being held in the Palace of Westminster committee rooms certainly were an added attraction and we were delighted to have substantive contributions from packed rooms.

Three years later it was clear a slightly amended version was needed for boards overseeing a number of academies, and '21 questions for MAT boards' came into being in a similar fashion. Trusts have an added incentive to review their practice in that they need to report to their members on their governance effectiveness; there is no better way than by



A different perspective

Getting an outsider's view of your governance work could give invaluable insight, explains NGA chief executive **Emma Knights**

presenting the members at the AGM with review outcomes.

The 20/21 questions have become part of the governance establishment. They are consistently widely used, always in our top 10 downloads (approximately 5,000 a year), disseminated by many other organisations and referenced in the DfE's Governance Handbook. NGA also has an online version of the questions to make the self-evaluation process even easier and more effective. Everyone contributes in advance at a time of their choosing, the results are discussed when everyone is together, and an NGA consultant provides an expert eye.

How self-reviews are conducted is important. Is



EMMA KNIGHTS OBE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

TAKE PART

The time has come to review the 20/21 questions. Please contribute your views or experience by 7 March 2022:

- Complete a short survey: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/NGA-20-21-web
- Email your thoughts: 20 questions for the board of a single school: Tajinder.Juss@nga.org.uk 21 questions for the board of a MAT: Clare Collins@nga.org.uk
- Attend an NGA members' event

it inclusive, honest and truly reflective? Do the chair, governance professional and the headteacher or chief executive all value it? Are there actions for improvement?

If you haven't had an ERG in the past three years, do commission one; if you have, then it could be time for a self-review. There is much going on in schools and it is easy to overlook or fail to prioritise consideration of whether the board is doing its job well. Are you making a difference?

Governance professionals support self-review and so are central to embedding this as good practice. We are planning to have revised questions ready for our annual Governance Professionals Conference at the end of March, in time for self-reviews planned for the summer term. ☺



*If there are things you want the DfE to hear, please do let us know your requests, demands or frustrations in any way that suits: email emma.knights@nga.org.uk, share your experiences on our blog page at nga.org.uk/blog or write an article for *Governing Matters* – email editor@nga.org.uk to discuss your ideas.*

Guides for governors and trustees

Welcome to Governance, 12th edition

This induction guide contains everything new school governors, trustees of standalone academies and members of academy committees in multi academy trusts need to know about their roles.

If you have NGA GOLD membership, all new governors/trustees will receive a complimentary copy of Welcome to Governance.

The Chair's Handbook, 8th edition

The Chair's Handbook is a valuable resource for new and experienced chairs of governing boards and academy trusts. It is also useful for vice chairs and those chairing committees.

If you are a chair of a trust board with NGA MAT membership or a chair of a board with NGA GOLD membership, you will receive a complimentary copy.

Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust, 4th edition

An entry level induction guide, Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust is essential reading if you are new to governing a multi academy trust board or if you want to refresh your knowledge.

If you have NGA Multi Academy Trust membership, all new trustees will receive a complimentary copy.



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