

THE WILTSHIRE GOVERNOR

Newsletter

Term 5 - April 2020

Wiltshire School Governance Service – helping governors, trustees and clerks become more effective

Welcome

Spring is here, with birdsong louder than usual and the natural world displaying all its true wonder through flowers, blossom and beautiful blue skies. During these unprecedented times it is these familiar cycles and routines that help give us stability and direction. I have now been in my new role for 6 months and who could have predicted this turn of events. COVID-19 has impacted on everyone's lives and our thoughts are with anyone who is suffering or struggling in whatever capacity at this time.

Our teachers in Wiltshire have been amazing with over 100 schools open over Easter for vulnerable and key workers' children. The Local Authority has worked hand in hand with schools to help facilitate this where needed and continues to offer clear guidance and support for all Headteachers with daily updates. As we move into Term 5, what does business as usual even look like for us as a governor? Hopefully throughout this newsletter we will begin to unpick this together through articles, blogs, guidance and even a request for volunteers for a Chair of Governors reference group so that I can hear directly from you about how we as a team can best support you.

In the last few newsletters we talked about the 7 principles of public life set out by Lord Nolan, and in addition to those, that governors should be committed, curious, confident, challenging, collaborative, critical and creative. We have now talked about being a curious and committed governor and how we don't need to be an experienced governor to be curious and ask key questions, but we do need capacity of time and training to be a committed governor. The next principle I would like to look at in this edition is **Challenging** and what this looks like and feels for us, as governors, in the ever-changing and challenging educational environment.

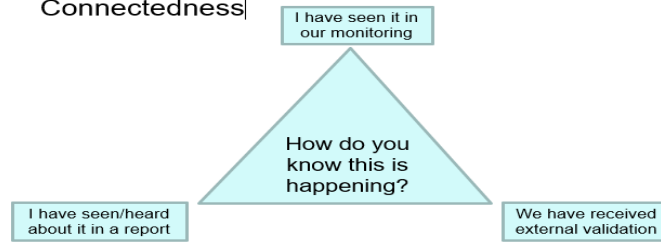
A Challenging Governor

To provide a thorough and relevant level of strategic challenge for our schools at board level, we strategically monitor the School Development Plan (SDP) and other key areas such as safeguarding, SEND and finances. Remember, the SDP is the operational aspect of the school and it is not down to governors to write, that is left to the professionals. However, we do feed into the SDP (around June/July) after we have reviewed the outcomes of governors' monitoring throughout the year against our strategic priorities. We monitor the SDP plan through: 1) monitoring visits; 2) being presented with key information through meetings; and 3) through external validation from our School Improvement Advisor's (SIA) visits and benchmarking around outcomes, reviews and other tools. These 3 areas are often referred to as triangulation or connectedness.

Some will have seen this diagram:

Triangulation

Connectedness



However, what we are monitoring has changed overnight due to Covid-19, so how can we still provide that correct level of strategic challenge and not get ourselves involved in those operational aspects of everyday school life? **What does business as usual look like?**

Business as usual

Firstly, we should all have had, or have set up for the first week back, a Full Governing Board (FGB) meeting. This will need to be held remotely through one of the platform providers that you as a board feel is appropriate for your school. A recent poll from 'Governors for Schools' found from governors attending a recent webinar that only 24 % of governing boards had held the appropriate remote meeting. It is important Boards get minuted all their appropriate challenges to the changing situation.

GBs may hold meetings remotely in exceptional circumstances. The clerk should be asked to send an email in advance to propose that the meeting will be held remotely.

- The first agenda item should be a vote on agreeing to this proposal. The GB has to formally approve 'alternative arrangements' so that the meeting can be attended remotely. For Maintained schools this is regulation 14(8) of **The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013**, and for Academies – article 126 of the **model articles of association**.

I have included from my previous letter 2 documents to support your first meeting.



GB protocols for
electronic participation

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Holding meetings
remotely, March 2020

[electronic participation in meetings March 2020.docx](\\1csrvnas04\voln\deptdata\sis\govsup\data\Worddata\GS Documents Current\Holding meetings remotely, March 2020.docx)

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The NGA has written an article on **Governing virtually - three boards share their experience in our new blog**.

This is a really useful blog and well worth a visit and you will notice that one of our own Wiltshire Local Leaders in Governance (LLG) Stella is leading the way – well done Stella and Fynamore School.

“Most boards will now have had to hold, or consider how they will hold, meetings virtually to continue with urgent business whilst schools are closed and people must socially distance.

Representatives of three governing boards share in this blog their own experiences, tips and advice having moved quickly to holding a virtual board meeting due to the impact of COVID-19. Stella Fowler is chair of governors at Fynamore Primary School in Wiltshire; Claire Hawkes is Clerk to Governors at Alderbrook School, a secondary

academy in Solihull; and Deryck Hall is Chair of Governors at Kitwell Primary School and Nursery in Birmingham”.

You can read the blog on the NGA website [here](#).

Secondly, the focus of governors’ meetings should now be around the review of the school’s business continuity plan and all the measures that have been put in place to support them as they stay open for key workers’ children, vulnerable children and SEND.

What measures have been put in place to support around social distancing

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings?utm_source=539206a3-9c7c-4d60-8982-d2b72fd191a8&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=daily

Coronavirus (COVID-19): SEND risk assessment guidance

and safeguarding of all parties around cleaning and access to adequate facilities and resources? A lot of policies will need to be reviewed especially around on-line learning and what provision there is for children who can’t access any on-line learning. (Remember, governors are not operational to be suggesting ways of how this is done, we are strategically reviewing the processes that our professionals are putting in place.) A robustness around the conversations of social distancing for all on site and what measures are in place to safeguard those at drop off and pick-ups and a need for a member of staff with Pediatric First Aid training to be available.

Thirdly, vulnerable children are vitally important and knowing how many vulnerable learners you have and how many are accessing the provision of school, and if not, what processes are in place by all relevant parties to safeguard these children during this time. The government has published an Interim Safeguarding Guidance for all schools see the link - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>

Bearing this document in mind the NGA have put together a very useful document for all governing boards to support their good practice around safeguarding. <https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/661645b5-80ff-44a0-8fed-13bd2cf3afdc/NGA-Coronavirus-Guidance-Issue-4-19-March-2020.pdf>

Fourthly Well-Being

Staff well-being is vitally important as schools are remaining open in term time for vulnerable and key workers’ children and some in holiday time too, and when teachers aren’t in school they are working from home. The educational landscape has completely changed and therefore we as governors need to know that their well-being is considered during this challenging time. I have included a couple of documents to support your knowledge and understanding of what messages are going to schools hoping that this helps your discussions around this area.



Working from Home
pro tips (004).pdf



Teachers wellbeing
guide -FINAL.pdf

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Current\Working from home, pro-tips.pdf\\1csrvnas04\voln\deptdata\sis\govsup\data\Worddata\GS Documents
Current\Protecting teachers' wellbeing amid the coronavirus outbreak.pdf](#)

Remember that included in staff well-being is that of the Headteachers who are currently working very hard and governors are directly responsible for their well-being. Chairs of Governors should stay in touch with their Head teacher and have those strategic conversations allowing them to talk things through with you, but don’t involve yourselves in the operational aspects.

Finally, Planning for those future strategic conversations – the curious governor

I recently read an article from Schools Week and it starts to ask questions around the re-opening of schools and what that could look like. The government will clearly lead on this and guidance will be given. However, as governors it is important that we know the right questions to ask to check the robustness of our school's responses. Again, we are not involved in the operational side but asking key questions around compliance and accountability is vital, and in order to provide this strength of challenge, we need to keep abreast of key articles and guidance.

<https://schoolsweek.co.uk/a-seven-step-plan-to-reopen-schools/>

I have also added in a speech made by Gavin Williamson on the effect of Covid-19 on disadvantaged learners.

[Gavin Williamson speech on COVID-19 response](#)

Chair of Governors (CoG) Reference Group

I have included our Annual Offer below as it is that time of year again for schools wishing to continue to subscribe to School Governance Service for 2020-2021. The Government has not reduced any schools' funding over this time so that schools are given financial stability and can prepare and be ready for the next year. As I have mentioned previously our offer has changed very little from last year. However, I am aware that training is a big part of our support and development and how we can support you and your governors to get the most from your subscription is a key question at this present time. This is where I am asking for any CoGs who would like to volunteer to be part of a reference group so that I can personally speak to you and hear what support we can put in place to help our governing boards in these unprecedented times. I don't just want to reinvent the wheel as there are so many good webinars and training resources already set up on line but want to hear from our governors in Wiltshire and support you.

If you are happy to volunteer, please email our team on governorservices@wiltshire.gov.uk by the end of this week - Friday 24th March 2020 - and indicate your name and school. We will work out the best way to communicate with you and set up a remote meeting where you can have your voice heard.

Learning Link Updates

As part of the Governor Services' subscription package, all governors now have access to the NGA Learning Link. This e-learning platform gives accessible and personalised learning opportunities for online training for all governors.



If you are unsure whether your school has access to Learning Link, or would like any further information, please contact the team at learninglink@nga.org.uk.

There is also a link to the NGA webinar on Virtual Governance: governing through Coronavirus

You can now view and share a recording of the webinar [here](#).

2020/2021 Annual Subscription Offer – Thank you to all those who have already subscribed.

Our offer is out for the new year and discussed last month the offer has remained similar, but we are looking to upgrade the way we offer it. There has been a slight increase in price which is consistent within the Council.

Helping governors, trustees and clerks become more effective:

The School Governance Service seeks to help governing boards to fulfil their responsibilities and to provide appropriate support and training for governors, trustees, headteachers, clerks and company secretaries as they work together to create the best possible learning opportunities and best outcomes for pupils in their schools.

We offer the following - **core services through an annual subscription package:**

- Fully subsidised up-to-date training and development courses and events including specific training for chairs, induction for new governors and clerks, and governors with specific roles on the GB, including an online course booking system
- Access to online learning modules provided by the NGA with Virtual College
- Governors' cluster training and development delivered in your local area/school
- Information update briefings on relevant topics
- Support for your clerk/company secretary, including induction training, conferences and skills workshop sessions
- A range of support services including: fast and accurate information by email and telephone; monthly newsletters keeping governors and trustees up-to-date with new initiatives; weekly mailings via your clerk/company secretary; a range of relevant guidance documents and toolkits, and a dedicated resources page on our website for subscribers

Core offer price:

£1126

Admissions 2020 – 2021



As governors we need to be aware our schools are already preparing for 2020 – 2021 and the implications that Covid-19 now has on the appeals process.

Meanwhile please see the latest advice from the government on appeals.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/admission-appeals-for-school-places>

Please see briefing on this link from the Ministry of Housing, Community & Local Government (MHCLG):

The coronavirus outbreak will impact on the ability of admission authorities to carry out admission appeals in the usual way. However, parents must continue to have the right to appeal to any school which has refused their child a place. Regulatory changes will be made that will relax some of the current requirements set out in the School Admission Appeals Code 2012 and enable admission authorities to proceed with their admission appeals.

The regulations are subject to legislation being made, but the DfE expects them to come into force on 24 April 2020. The regulations will be time-limited and will expire on 31 January 2021.

The new regulations will:

- disapply the requirement that appeals panels must be held in person and instead give flexibility for panel hearings to take place either in person, by telephone, video conference or through a paper-based appeal where all parties can make representations in writing
- relax the rules with regard to what happens if one of the 3 panel members withdraws (temporarily or permanently) to make it permissible for the panel to continue with and conclude the appeal as a panel of 2
- amend the deadlines relating to appeals for the time that the new regulations are in force

The DfE will publish guidance to support admission authorities and local authorities in carrying out admission appeals over the coming months to provide further details on these regulations.

Staying in touch with you, and you with us

Julia Kirwan is sending out weekly clerk mailings via Right Choice in term time where the School Governance team communicates with clerks on any key areas of update or consideration. Please make sure you are receiving these from your clerk each week. We will also be sending out our Termly Newsletter and additional newsletters if the occasion arises as with COVID-19.

Please stay in touch with us as a team since it is important we work together to best support all schools.

Thank you for taking the time to read our Newsletter.

From the School Governance Service team:

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Right Choice