

C-19 COVID-19 Public Health Crisis Governor and Trustee Updates

This week here is a ‘slimmed’ down version of the Covid 19 Update, providing information released or updated since the last edition. If you would like to access previous versions of the update, which includes sample agendas, guides on setting up online meetings, then copies can be found on the [Norfolk School website by following this link](#) or via [GovernorHub](#).

14.05.2020

1 More children attending education settings from 1st June

The government have announced that from the week commencing 1 June, more pupils will be welcomed back to early years, school and further education settings. It was stated that this will only been done provided that the 5 key tests set by government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the roadmap are operating effectively. As a result they are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

Below is some of the governments guidance to help with that planning. They have stated that further guidance on these, and other important areas, will be developed with the sector in the coming days and weeks.;

[What parents and carers need to know about schools and other education settings during the coronavirus outbreak](#)

[Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020](#)

[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings](#)

[Opening schools for more children and young people initial planning framework for schools in england](#)

The National Governance Association (NGA) have suggested that the DfE also needs to produce guidance specifically for governing boards and this is expected in due course. In the meantime, the NGA have produced the following guidance to confirm where responsibility lies:

- 1.** The final decision on whether to invite pupils back will rest with schools and academy trusts. Schools should only invite those pupils back when and if their assessment of the risk is that it is safe for both children and staff to do so. While school leaders will be beginning to assess options, there is no need to rush into any decisions immediately.
- 2.** Re-opening a school is an operational decision which is taken by school leaders. Clearly any decision made by school leaders will need to take into account the DfE guidance, applying it to the school's individual context. We expect school leaders to consult with their governing boards who have a role as employers (or in place of employers) and a duty of care to pupils.
- 3.** The headteacher (or possibly another executive within a multi academy trust) will need to undertake a full risk assessment before making a decision, and it would be wise for them to bring that assessment to their governing board. Governing boards, while trusting their professional leaders to carry out that assessment, should test its robustness. The assessment will need to be kept under review.
- 4.** In developing the options, a board would be reasonable in expecting school leaders to have consulted staff and parents; the latter is particularly important to understanding what the response might be to an invitation for their child to return to school. Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time, and schools and colleges will not be held to account for attendance levels.
- 5.** We would also expect a school leader to discuss the options with the chair and the vice chair of the governing board, using them as sounding boards for this very difficult decision. (In a multi academy trust, we would still expect a headteacher to be in contact with the chair of the academy committee/local governing board - as well as trust's central executive - as the academy chair will be aware of the local context and premises in a way that the chair of the trust board may not).
- 6.** Governing boards, and chairs in particular, may be asked to support the communications to the whole school community – staff, parents and more widely. Chairs may be asked to co-sign letters from the headteacher/CEO. This illustrates the importance of the board being behind the leader's decision as they will need to be able to advocate for the position. There is a role for governing boards in constructing, with their senior leaders, confident communications which fit with their school's values and ethos, putting the welfare of pupils at the heart of decision making.
- 7.** These are extremely difficult decisions to take and it is imperative that school leaders and chairs of governing boards maintain regular contact. We are aware of much wonderful school leadership over the past two months, but this must not be taken for granted and it is crucial that their well-being is not being compromised. As you are no doubt aware, governing boards owe a duty of care to staff, and in particular to their senior leader.

Governing boards need to continue to show their support for their schools and trusts in a proportionate fashion, as so many of you have been doing, being there for your senior leaders with guidance when necessary, but without adding to the immense pressure of the situation. We are

also aware that governing boards are not immune to this strain and anxiety; in particular, chairs will no doubt welcome the support of other members of the board.

2 Risk Assessment and Health and Safety Guidance

Following the government announcement of the intention to extend education settings opening to specific year groups from 1st June, NCC has produced a risk assessment template for settings to use. Completion of this template will demonstrate your compliance with both your legal obligations to undertake an assessment of the health and safety risks and the national guidance on infection control and safety measures for operation. The template is now [available on Norfolk Schools](#) and [infospace](#).

3 Workload and wellbeing of staff

Following the recent announcement of plans for some pupils to return to school from 1st June, coupled with the fact that some schools have been open throughout the Easter holidays and are likely to remain open during half term, it is likely that some staff, particularly headteachers, have been working under increased pressure and not getting any suitable 'down time' to recuperate.

The Governance Handbook states:

All boards should have regard to the work-life balance of teachers and the executive leadership of the organisations.

Boards should have due regard for the wellbeing and mental health of the school leadership team and teaching staff more broadly. Boards may wish to consider designating a governor or trustee as a wellbeing champion to provide strategic support to the school leadership team as appropriate.

Also, the competency framework for governance states that the board should **'pay due regard to ensuring that leaders and teachers are able to have a satisfactory work-life balance, including a manageable workload.'**

Some key questions that we could consider at this time are:

- **What effect is workload having on teaching, staff morale in your school(s)? How do you know?**
- **What effect is workload having on teaching, staff morale and recruitment and retention in your school(s)? How do you know?**
- **What action has your school(s) taken to review and streamline policies and practice?**
- **Have these actions had an impact? How do you know?**
- **Do school leaders feel able to take action on workload?**
- **How does the board address work-life balance of the headteacher and other staff?**
- **How can the board support workload reduction?**

Does the board:

- **Embed workload and wellbeing considerations when reviewing school/trust policies?**
- **Consider the impact board decisions have on workload across the school, and consider how workload can be minimised?**

- Review the composition and business of the board, including meetings (length, frequency and content) and papers?
- Consider flexible working for staff?

Please consider how your board is reacting to the current situation and how you can support the staff in your school. Also take a look at the [Mental Health, Stress and Wellbeing Toolkit](#) which can be found in the 'Toolkit – Audit Tools' section of the 'Resources' on GovernorHub and contains lots more questions for your board to consider.

4 Eligibility for government childcare offers protected

[Temporary measures](#) ensure critical workers will still be eligible for childcare offers if their income has changed due to coronavirus. Guidance for early years and childcare providers during the coronavirus outbreak will be updated in due course to reflect these temporary changes.

5 Bitesize learning



The Governance and Leadership Service provides a range of training courses to support governors and trustees subscribing to our services. We will shortly be releasing our offer of online Bitesize courses. The bitesize courses take our face to face sessions, breaking them down into easy to digest sections that you can complete at home when the time is right for you. Most courses are 3-4 sections long, ranging from 5 to 20 minutes, with downloadable supporting resources.

You'll need speakers or headphones and you're ready to get started. We will let you know when we have uploaded our 'core courses' to GovernorHub so you can begin. We will then add new courses as we complete them.

Key messages – Support, Prioritise, Challenge

The response to the COVID-19 public health crisis is evolving and fast moving. We recognise that with social distancing measures in place, and the uncertainty of how this crisis will develop over the coming weeks and months, many governors and trustees are asking themselves how they can effectively support their schools.

The Governance and Leadership Service from Educator Solutions are advising that governing boards. **Let's examine what we mean by this...**



Support

Chairs will be a crucial critical friend to head teachers during this challenging time, with many being a much needed 'sounding board' to help head teachers, while also monitoring their wellbeing. Stay in touch with the head teacher if appropriate but consider labelling emails 'Not urgent' to support them to prioritise.

We need to remember as governors we fulfil a **strategic** function, and so must be conscious not to hamper the complicated **operational** challenges being faced by our schools. We do, however,

have a duty to provide **constructive challenge**, and to do this we first need to ascertain what our priorities as a governing board are.



Prioritise

With so much happening, it is important to take time to think about what is really important at the moment. Your chair, a small committee, or governing board may wish to **identify what needs to be considered urgently** (e.g. approving the budget, ensuring policies key to delivering contingency plans are approved, etc), while all non-urgent business can be delayed until a later date. **Using technology to meet virtually** is being adopted by many boards.

On-going time-sensitive matters, such as exclusions and complaints procedures, may need to be placed on hold if it is not possible to manage the process remotely. This will need to be assessed on a case by case basis by the board and clerk. Keep those involved in the process informed and seek their views about the best way to proceed. Ensure that accurate records of decisions are kept and stored securely. Even in these challenging circumstances, decisions need to be made with care.



Challenge

We need to be a **critical friend** at this time, to help ensure that, as an organisation, we are doing the right thing by those in our care.

Meeting in a virtual environment to **discuss and provide appropriate challenge** regarding decisions is key to this. Whichever method you choose to use to host these meetings, we recommend the free to use Microsoft Teams application. It is important that clerks continue to record challenge and provide an audit trail of decisions made, supporting you to comply with legal considerations regarding governance (e.g. are you quorate?). A **trained professional clerk remains a key part of the governing board** in these testing times.

We also need to give consideration to the head teacher and staff at this time, and we should be flexible and pragmatic when it comes to the format information is communicated to us (e.g. more verbal updates than written reports), and we should have an appreciation of the pressure staff are under. We are sure you will want to use these meetings as an opportunity to thank the head teacher for their hard work, and for them to relay the thanks of the governing board to staff.

Earlier editions of the [Governor and Trustee Update can be located on the Norfolk School website.](#)

You can contact the Governor Service team using the email address:
governor.services@educatorsolutions.org.uk