

Parental engagement: A guide for governing boards

September 2019





The National Governance Association (NGA) is the leading membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks in state-funded schools, academies and free schools in England.

We are an independent 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 do this by providing information; guidance and advice; undertaking research; delivering face-to-face training, e-learning and consultancy; and holding conferences and events. We work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies and ensure the views of governors are represented at the national level.

To find out more about NGA, its services and membership, please visit the NGA website www.nga.org.uk.

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Parentkind

Bringing together home & school

Parentkind is a charity that has for over 60 years inspired and enabled parents to play an active role in their child's education and school life. We are also the leading membership body for Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and parent councils in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Since 2016, we have supported schools in engaging and involving parents through guidance, training and membership.

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Introduction

Thank you for your interest in this guidance which highlights the powerful impact parents can have on their child's education and examines how governing boards can engage successfully with parents and carers in their school(s).

Listening and working well with all school stakeholders is a key part of the governing board's role and principal among these is the parent community. The participation of parents is an important aspect of school governance which provides boards with key insights into their school(s), ensures they demonstrate transparency and better decision-making, and allows them to work in partnership with parents to deliver the best educational outcomes for every pupil.

Although an enjoyable and satisfying part of the role, doing this effectively can be a complex and sometimes intimidating endeavour and governing boards may be faced with challenges and barriers when attempting to do this well and successfully.

This joint guidance from the National Governance Association (NGA) and Parentkind will help governing boards ensure that every school they govern has a parent-friendly culture and will provide them with practical information and ideas to help generate a productive and rewarding two-way dialogue with parents.



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Why engaging with and involving parents is key to good governance

NGA defines governance as determining “who has the power, who makes the decisions, how other players make their voices heard and how account is rendered” (taken from the Institute of Governance, Canada). A key aspect of this definition, “how voices are heard”, is ensuring that stakeholder views are taken into account in the decision-making process. Indeed, governing boards should not work in isolation and NGA considers ensuring that the voices of school stakeholders are heard to be the fourth core function of governance.

Parents are one of the most vital stakeholder groups, and how your governing board communicates with and involves them is crucial to your school’s success. The Department for Education (DfE) highlights the importance of the role that parents play within effective governance in its [Governance Handbook](#) (2019):

As the strategic leaders of their organisations it is vital that boards are connected with, and answerable to, the communities they serve, particularly parents/carers. [...]

Boards should ensure that their organisation is regularly communicating with parents and carers and that parental engagement is used by the board to inform their strategic decision-making.

The purpose of engaging with parents is not to implement the will of parents without question. Rather, it is a consultative process. The governing board should listen to parents’ views, and take a considered course of action which may at times differ from parent feedback, in the interest of pupils. What is important is being clear from the outset what is open for consultation, and what isn’t.

Having an ongoing and open dialogue with parents can make those governing feel connected with and confident in the school’s commitment to serve them. NGA recommends governing boards follow the seven Nolan principles of public life, which includes openness and accountability, features essential to engaging with parents. Without these characteristics, your governing board is not only doing a disservice to the parent community but also to themselves. Engaging with parents is a mutually beneficial endeavour; as much as involving parents can improve their own perceptions

and experiences with their child’s school, parents can help governing boards to improve and perform their role to the highest standard.

1.1: How effective parental engagement can help the board perform its role

Being a school governor or trustee is an immensely rewarding role; you have the opportunity to make a real difference to not only the pupils within your school(s) but to your community as a whole.

Knowing your school(s) is one of NGA’s eight elements of effective governance and a key part of this is understanding your school’s parents; their needs and opinions are integral to ensuring good governance in many areas. This is summarised in the table on the next page.

Seven Nolan Principles of Public Life:

1. Selflessness
2. Integrity
3. Objectivity
4. Accountability
5. Openness
6. Honesty
7. Leadership

How can engaging parents help to ensure good governance?

1

Fulfilling your school improvement plan

Engaging with parents as partners in school improvement can help your school fulfil the school improvement plan. Attendance, behaviour and attainment are all examples of areas where engaging and developing solutions in partnership with parents can support the school in achieving its aims to the benefit of pupils.

Being aware of and acting on the feedback and concerns of parents gives them the opportunity to drive the change they want to see for their children, creating a sense of shared ownership of the school's vision.

2

Holding executive leaders to account

Engaging with parents provides a valuable opportunity to obtain information on the effectiveness of a school in areas such as performance. It can also help to identify potential issues that might otherwise go undetected. Knowing the views of parents, therefore, can enable governing boards to ask the right questions when supporting and challenging school leaders, informing the strategy and prompting lines of enquiry.

3

Shaping ethos, culture, vision and strategy

It is essential that the board promotes an open culture which welcomes, listens and responds to parents' views when setting the vision, values and ethos of their school(s). Being proactive in this aim is also important and can create a positive relationship, which will give parents the confidence that their views are valued and are taken into account in decisions, which will directly impact them and their children.

It is also necessary that the governing board communicates the ethos of the school to parents, as a minimum on the school website and preferably beyond.

Questions governing boards should ask: Does our school's value and vision statement promote and value parental engagement? How do we enable this?

4

Legal duty and governing board's responsibilities on parental engagement

By law, governing boards must consult with parents on some specific changes such as the admission criteria and, in maintained schools, the behaviour policy [see section three for more details].

Additionally, while there is no statutory obligation on governing boards to report to parents on progress toward achieving the school's strategic aims, NGA think it is good practice to do this annually. This will give the board the opportunity to share the strategic plan, celebrate the successes of the school and demonstrate the impact of governance on pupils' outcomes and experiences.

5

Accountability to parents and the community

Engagement with parents is not a one-way relationship, and it is important that parents engage with the governing board as much as the governing board engages with parents.

Governing boards should be held accountable to ensure that they are performing to their full potential, providing value for money and being responsive to the community they are serving. To be accountable, engaging with parents is paramount. As part of good governance and practice, the board must provide clear information, be transparent and ensure that parents have a voice in key decisions.

1.2: The role of parent governors on the governing board

For maintained schools, a governing board must have at least two parent governors. While the number of parental representatives will be different in academies, in 2016 NGA successfully campaigned for academy trusts to have elected parental representatives. This is to ensure that academies consider a diverse range of views when making decisions, and remain grounded in their communities.

Parental engagement should not be conflated with the presence of parent governors. A parent governor is a voice from the parent body, not the only voice of the parental body. The DfE's *Governance Handbook* (2019) states:

The board as a whole should take steps to understand what parents think, while acknowledging that anyone on the board who is a parent themselves has valuable knowledge and perspectives about the school(s) to bring to bear in discussions and decisions and helps to guarantee that there is a link between governance and the parent community.

However, they cannot be seen as a substitute for parental engagement as the handbook goes on to stipulate. The parents of a school are a diverse body coming from many walks of life and one or even two individuals cannot be expected to encapsulate or understand all of their views. This is especially important when considering that parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds are more likely to take on a governing board role. A wider effort of engagement involving different mechanisms and networks should be in place to engage meaningfully with all parents/carers to enable them to put forward the things important to them in their child's education.

1.3: What Ofsted says

The schools inspectorate, Ofsted, continues to show an interest in how schools involve and communicate with parents. The launch of *Parent View*, combined with their efforts to evaluate the effectiveness of parental engagement in their recent frameworks, demonstrates this most clearly.

Parent View is an online questionnaire which allows parents and carers to give feedback on their child's school and once a certain number of responses have been received, governors and trustees can view the results, alongside school leaders, yielding percentage results and graphs, which can be used to identify areas for school improvement. Currently only 5% of parents engage with this service but Ofsted does use this resource as evidence when inspecting a school.

Note on this section

Please note that this section refers to *Parent View*. While the information in this section is correct at the time of publication, Ofsted is currently in the process of reviewing *Parent View* and may replace this with an alternative in the near future.

Multi academy trusts (MATs)

As part of their articles of association, MATs still have a requirement for two parental representatives at some level in the governance structure. However, where those governing are given the choice between having parent trustees or parents on academy committees, many MATs have opted for the latter choice.

While NGA does not take a view on whether parents should be specifically represented at a trust board or local level, it is important that they are represented somewhere. Crucially, mechanisms and processes need to be in place for those at a local tier to feed back concerns and ideas to the board of trustees in order to influence decision-making. For example, Parentkind advocates for a consultative parent body within the accountability structure of every school, with direct lines of communication to decision-makers within the school or trust.

Ofsted's recently published *Inspection Framework* (2019) outlines several areas where parental engagement is monitored and where parents' views are sought as key evidence. *Parent View* also found that in schools "where they have actively communicated with parents, the number of responses on *Parent View* has been higher and their results on *Parent View* have been overwhelmingly positive". Ofsted have also commented that *Parent View* is rarely used as a complaints mechanism and schools are able to sign up to the website to receive email alerts about any responses.

How will Ofsted involve parents in their inspections?

When a school receives notification of an Ofsted inspection, it has a statutory duty to "to notify all registered parents of registered pupils at the school, including those who have been excluded, attend alternative provision or are away from school" (*Ofsted Handbook*). While this duty will be carried out by executive leaders, those governing should seek assurances that this has been completed.

Evidence

Ofsted will source any evidence from “the ways in which leaders and managers have responded to concerns raised by staff or parents” to “the views of parents and carers, including those shown by Ofsted *Parent View*”, particularly when analysing risk assessments.

Prior to the visit, Ofsted will send a letter (either printed or electronically) to parents which explains how they can contact inspectors and use *Parent View*. Informal meetings may be conducted with parents without the presence of school staff. Inspectors may also take into account results of past surveys commissioned by the school and “if any individual’s parents raise serious issues, inspections will follow these up with the school and record its response”.

Evaluation

When judging the effectiveness of leadership within the organisation, Ofsted will consider the governing boards’ vision for the school and how this is communicated to stakeholders, including parents, and will look to see “whether leaders seek to engage parents and their community thoughtfully and positively in a way that supports pupils’ education”.

This is important because it demonstrates that Ofsted is keen to hear the views of parents and will consider how the board and school leaders engage with parents effectively in their overall judgement. Gathering opinions through internal surveys and parent consultations (see section three of this guidance for more examples) on specific issues can allow the board to get an indication on parents’ views and make changes through this – thereby showing parents that the governors are receptive to their thoughts.

1.4: Engaging with parents in a multi academy trust

As outlined in section 1.2, MATs still have a requirement to have two parents on either the trust board or at a local level. However, just like maintained schools, it is clear that two parents will not be able to speak for the whole parent body in any meaningful way.

This is compounded by the fact that, particularly in larger and/or geographically dispersed organisations, a MAT may find itself with a very large and extremely dispersed parent body stretching over multiple communities. MATs have come under criticism in recent years for being “disconnected” from the communities they serve. Particularly in larger MATs, the board of trustees may have to make decisions for schools that some trustees have never even visited, within communities that trustees may have very little knowledge about.

This can sometimes lead to trustees over-relying on executives to feedback on parents’ views to the trust board. While useful in some circumstances, this impedes trustees’ ability to use parental feedback to hold executive leaders to account.

Instead, in order to know schools well, hold the executive leader to account effectively, and make decisions in the best interest of pupils and parents, it is vitally important that MATs meaningfully engage with parents and the wider community. Many MATs use their local tier to do this effectively, ensuring that there is a link between those at a local level and the community by putting mechanisms and processes in place through a scheme of delegation to allow these groups to influence trust board decision-making.

In summary, engaging with parents can help governing boards:

- Fulfil their legal requirements to consult parents on specific changes to school policy
- Shape school ethos, vision and strategy with parent stakeholders in mind
- Stay accountable to the wider community
- Establish trust between governing boards and parents/carers
- Gain insight into the issues faced by parents and pupils that might otherwise go unnoticed
- Expand the parental perspective within the board beyond that of the parent governor/trustee
- Deliver effective parental engagement to fulfil Ofsted’s Inspection Framework requirements and canvass opinions for school improvement

Becoming a parent-friendly school

As section one shows, engaging with parents is essential to effective governance. However, research has shown that parents also have an immensely powerful and positive impact on educational outcomes. When parents are involved within their child's school, their child benefits from improved academic performance as noted by the Social Mobility Commission (2017):

The more involved the parents were in their children's school life (including volunteering in school, participating in Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) conferences, and teaching at home), the more positive the impact became on children's performance academically. [...] only a minority of parents in the United Kingdom are uninterested in their children's education. Instead the majority may experience difficulty in expressing their interest, something which is identified and acknowledged by professionals.

Parents care about their children's future and are influential in shaping their aspirations and educational outcomes. Further sources of research tell us that when parents are involved in education, their children do better in many aspects of school life including attainment, attendance and behaviour.

“ Parental engagement is a powerful lever for raising achievement in schools. When parents and teachers work together to improve learning, the gains in achievement are significant. ”

Harris and Goodall, *Do Parents Know they Matter*, 2007.

“ The effect of parental engagement over a student's school career is equivalent to adding two or three years to that student's education. ”

John Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*, 2008.

Parents are therefore a powerful ally for schools and their child's education. Schools can harness this by engaging effectively with them to understand their views of the education being provided, and how they can be influential in creating positive outcomes for them and their students.

Giving parents a voice also forms an important part of the inspection and regulation of schools as mentioned in section 1.3, yet opportunities to gather views from parents are not always fully utilised by schools.

This section will cover how to identify and overcome potential barriers parents face which prevent them from engaging with their child's school and will detail the benefits of a whole school approach.

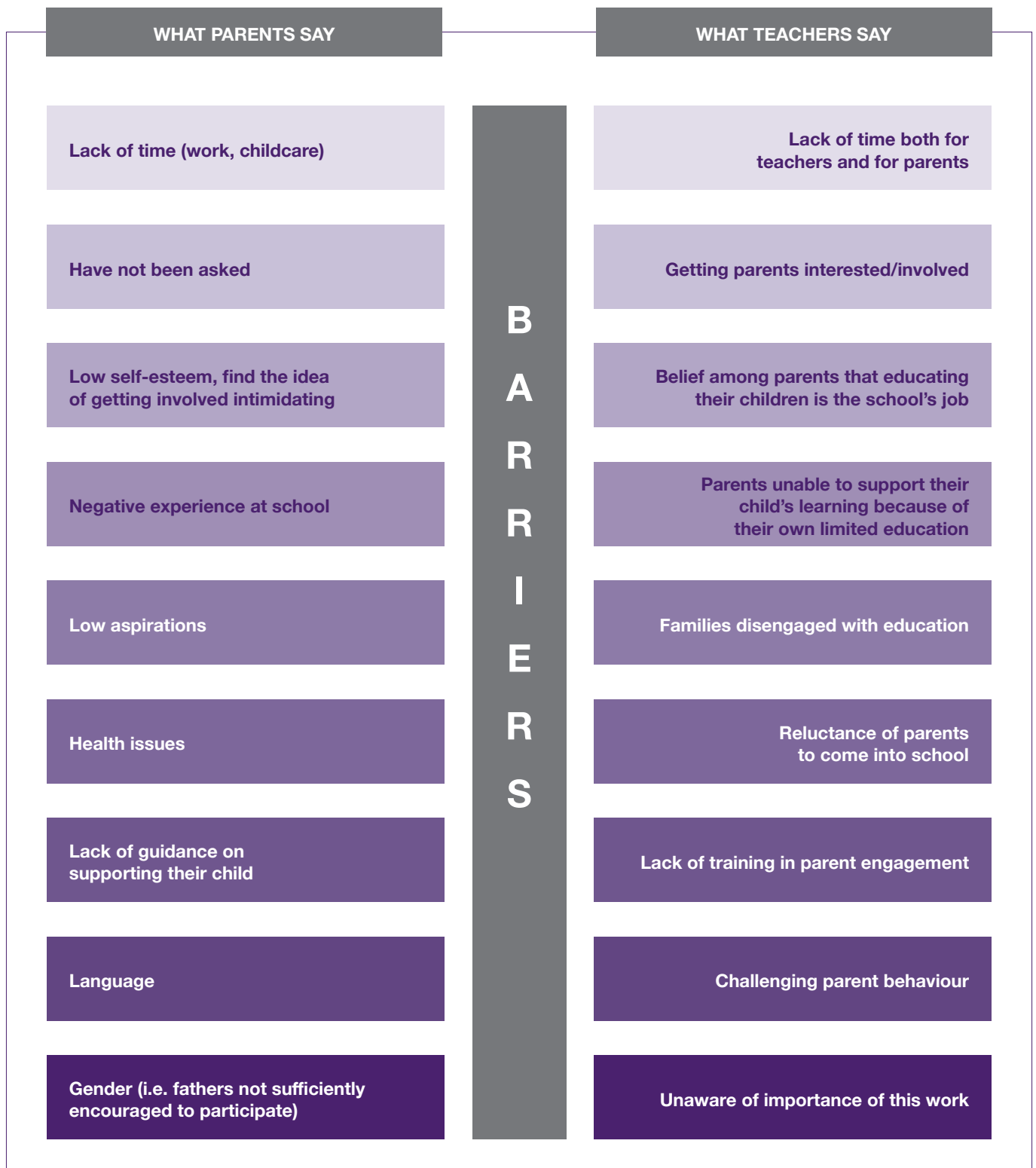
2.1: Barriers and challenges to parental engagement

Although parents are interested in having a say in their child's school, and schools stand to benefit from their input, there are still many barriers and challenges which can stand in the way and identifying why parents do not engage with their child's school is crucial when developing any strategies to tackle parental engagement.

While the governing board must ensure parental engagement has been effectively deployed across the school, school leaders and teaching staff are at the forefront, and the face of, most parental engagement schemes.

Parentkind has surveyed both parents and teachers over the last few years and has identified barriers that both parties face when working together.

What parents and teachers identify as the barriers to working together



Additionally, Parentkind's research found that some staff felt anxious about engaging with parents and/or felt that they did not have the means to do so effectively.

Although these barriers may cause schools to be hesitant when engaging with parents, those that do are often richly rewarded. The Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) report [Working with Parents to Support Children's Learning](#) (2018) suggests that schools should be optimistic about the potential of working with parents as:

- there is an established link between the home learning environment at all ages and children's performance at school
- schools and parents have a shared priority to deliver the best outcomes for their children

According to recent surveys, EEF report that almost all teachers believe that parental engagement has a positive impact on their schools but few school leaders currently provide staff with training on how to engage with parents or have an active plan in place for how they would prefer staff to engage with parents.

In light of this, it is essential that governors and trustees ensure their school(s) provide teachers and other school staff with the correct skills and tools to engage with parents, whether this be

through internal or external training. Staff should also have a clear understanding of how engaging with parents feeds into the school improvement plan and of its importance to every child's education.

“ We know that levels of parental engagement are consistently associated with children's academic outcomes. We also know that a parent's job, education and income matters less to their child's development than what they actually do with them. ”

Sir Kevan Collins, chief executive, Education Endowment Foundation (EEF).

2.2: How parents want a say

Parentkind's [Annual parent survey](#) asks parents for their opinions and attitudes towards their children's school and education and this gives a yearly snapshot of the parental perspective. The results for 2018, as detailed below, demonstrate that while parents want more of a say in their child's education, many do not feel that their voices are heard.

Annual parent survey 2018 findings

Parents want more of a say in their child's education

- only 55% of parents said that schools are taking action based on their views or feedback
- the vast majority (two thirds) of parents agree that schools should be more accountable to them than they currently are
- the top three areas of school life on which parents would like to be consulted are: curriculum (56%), pupil behavior (51%), and homework (44%); however, only 27% of parents have been consulted on curriculum, 30% on discipline and exclusions policy and 32% on homework policy
- only 57% of parents report being satisfied with the opportunities to get involved in their child's school

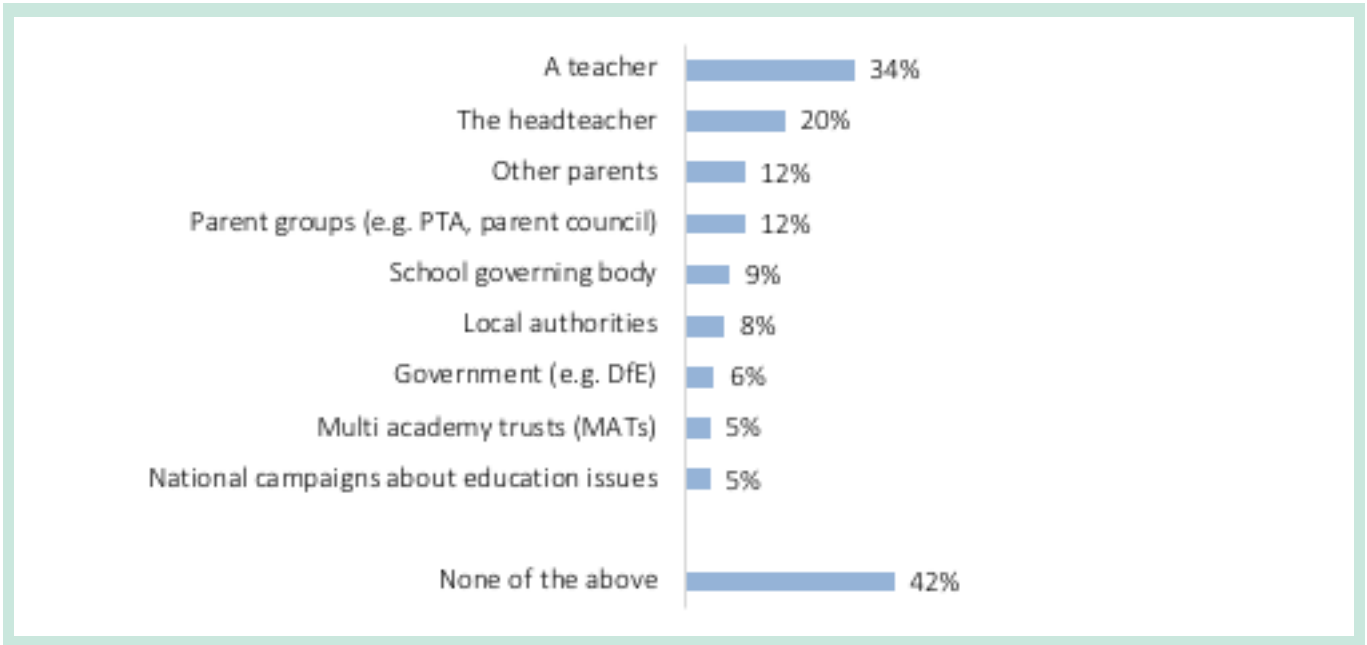
Many parents feel they do not have a say at MAT, local authority and government level

- six out of 10 (62%) parents want a say at this level but only three in 10 say their views are listened to
- only 30% felt listened to by government policy-makers

Very few parents engage directly at governing board level

- only 9% of parents have raised issues or provided ideas and feedback to school governors (compared to 34% for teachers and 20% for headteachers)
- younger parents (under 44) are more likely to communicate with governors

How parents raised issues and/or provided feedback on their child's school and education in 2018?



Very few parents choose to raise issues with governing boards, yet they are key agents in holding school leaders to account. Additionally, they are less likely to engage with their local/education authority, MATs or via government consultations or national campaigns.

Parentkind also found that parents value an 'open door' policy and there was also support for parent groups, consultative bodies and surveys. Therefore, using a variety of touchpoints to suit the preferences of a range of parents may be the best way to get parental input.

The mutual uncertainty over engagement can be created by a lack of understanding from parents about what school governors do and how they are accountable to them, and from school governors about what their parent community wants and the best ways to engage them.

These findings show that engagement with parents should be regular and meaningful, and built into the material of the governing board so that both parents and governors understand each other's role in school improvement (for guidance on how to increase and improve the governing board's profile within the school, see section 3.2). It should have impact at a strategic level, and be designed to help the board understand the strengths and weaknesses of the school, as well as to shape the school's vision and aspirations.

2.3: Taking a whole school approach to overcome barriers and becoming a parent-friendly school

While examining the potential barriers it is important that, as EEF advise, "a whole-school approach" is embedded and is properly "integrated into school planning".



Parentkind has reviewed available evidence and international best practice to produce a 'blueprint for parent-friendly schools'. This is a whole school framework to guide school leaders in how to maximise the potential for parents to play an active role in their child's education and school life by ensuring there is effort in all five key areas:

Leadership, ethos and resources

- setting a direction that values parental engagement
- prioritising parents through link governors or standing agenda items
- earmarking resources for suitable staff training and other CPD opportunities
- encourage a culture where parents and teachers work in partnership so every child reaches their potential

Effective two-way communication

- being accessible and finding ways to hear directly from a diverse range of parents
- being active in establishing different channels of communication

Community engagement

- ensuring your school is effectively engaging and consulting across the parent body inside and outside of school

Parents supporting learning

- encourage a culture where parents and teachers work in partnership so every child reaches their potential

Parent involvement in school life

- allow parents to inform policies, school improvement plans and decisions that directly affect them and feedback outcomes to them

Finally, governing boards must assess approaches by ensuring they have been properly implemented and seek continuously to improve.

Parent groups

Parent groups are one of the key mechanisms for creating a parent-friendly school. The most prevalent group is likely to be a parent teacher association (PTA) or equivalent. In PTAs, parents and school staff work together to encourage closer links between home and school and often perform an important fundraising function. There are also parent councils or forums, which are normally school-led consultative bodies where parents can discuss issues that may be affecting their children's education and school life. Additionally, parent action groups may form to campaign for a specific and often time-limited cause, or work on a specific school improvement project.

As governors and trustees, you can play an active role in supporting and working with the PTA or parent council including encouraging its foundation if there is not a parent group already in place. You could also identify someone on the governing board, perhaps, but not necessarily, a parent governor, who can be the main point of contact for the parent group, attending meetings to encourage collaboration.

While the PTA or parent council should not be seen as the sole channel for the governing board to engage with parents, an effective group can enable great dialogue and may help you reach parents who you would not otherwise be able to engage with the governing board alone. As well as allowing parents to have a voice, they can help build the school community and a culture of partnership and constructive feedback.

Enabling parents to inform strategic leadership and decisions

There are many ways that schools can create parent-friendly cultures which encourage parents to contribute their opinions, views and skillset to the benefit of the school's pupils. Approaches to listening to parents both individually and collectively should be developed to ensure you give every parent the opportunity to have their input.

It is also important to remember that every school's parent population is different and there can be no single approach. Each employed strategy's success should be monitored by the governing board who must ensure that all parents from all walks of life are contributing to the school. Failing to do this may result in a skewed understanding of parental opinion if you rely solely on those that volunteer.

This section contains practical tips on the ways that boards can plan to involve and engage parents. It is important when reviewing this section to recognise that the board's role is to supervise and inform the strategic direction of the school's vision but it is up to school leaders to operationally implement them.

3.1: Good practice for engaging with parents

Maximise your school's website

Schools are required by law to publish certain information on their website and this includes:

- a statement about the school's ethos and values as set by the governors or trustees
- the curriculum on offer
- the behaviour policy (this may vary depending on whether the school is LA maintained or an academy – for further information, please visit nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre)

It is not only important that governors and trustees ensure that their procedures (whether this is in relation to complaints or admissions) are online, but also that these are accessible to parents and are published in a prominent place on the website.

One way you can ensure accessibility for parents who do not speak English as their first language is to install a widget on the website, which can translate the page into their native language.

The DfE also stipulates that governing board details and information must be published, including each governor or trustee:

- 'full name, date of appointment, term of office'
- 'business and financial interests'
- 'attendance record at governing body and committee meetings over the last academic year'

In addition to this, it can be useful to provide a biography for each governor, indicated why they are interested in governing and their particularly area of speciality on the governing board.

Some schools also have a 'governor's/trustee's blog' where they detail how they are implementing their strategy, including success stories. While governors and trustees can be seen as remote, this approach can help to promote accessibility and help parents understand the role of the governing board and recognise governors and trustees when they see them.

The school website can also have a resource centre dedicated to parents, indicating how they can get involved with the school, whether this is formally through the PTA or more casually by attending social events and voicing their opinions in parent surveys. It can also provide resources for parents on helping their children with their learning, and assist with issues such as mental health and other care factors to make them fully aware of the resources available to them.

Social media and communications

While the school website is an important device in communicating to parents, it can be time-consuming for parents to look through all the documents there, and requires the parents to be proactive in seeking out information. Using social media channels or school communication apps such as Twitter and Facebook allows you to actively engage with parents' social media feeds and share the information you need them to know, as well as promote parent-intensive activities. Having different lines of communication across different networks allows parents to choose the most convenient way for them to see information interact. Similar options include a weekly e-newsletter or, as mentioned above, a governor/trustee blog sent to parents who opt-in to receive this.

You can also use this as an opportunity to communicate positive success stories proactively, as this demonstrates that the school not only acts reactively to negative news but also has an invested interest in promoting the positive achievements of its pupils and the school as a whole.

There will be a minority of parents who are not active on social media and therefore require different methods of communication. This can either be done face-to-face at events such as parents' evenings, meetings, or by sending a physical newsletter to the home.

Consultations and parent surveys

A parent survey is a vital resource for many schools when identifying how parents think of the school. It can also be used to indicate the causes of any dissatisfaction.

While promoting the collection of data through surveys and online forums, having an open door policy can create an inclusive and welcoming atmosphere, which can encourage parents to seek help at the school, whether this be out of concern for their child's learning or issues at home. Governors and trustees can also increase their visibility at parental events, which provide the opportunity for introductions, to gather parents' thoughts on the school and for questions from both sides. This can also go a long way in establishing an open relationship between parents and the governing board, which can increase accountability and understanding.

It's also good practice to produce an [annual report](#) for parents to communicate, or recommunicate, the school's strategic plan, and allow accountability to parents when delivering it. It is also another opportunity to celebrate the successes of the school, and increase parental understanding of the governing board's role, illustrating the impact of governance on pupil outcomes and their school experience.

Understanding your parent population

In the 2018 [Annual school governance survey](#), conducted in association with Tes, NGA found that 93% of participants classified their ethnic group as white, which is proportionally higher than the general population and pupil population of state-funded schools in England.

Diversity on governing boards is important, and is something that NGA is looking to address through the [Everyone on Board](#) campaign. Having a diverse governing board can provide a sense of connectedness between the school and local stakeholders, ensuring stakeholders feel valued and increasing confidence in the school as those making the decisions understand the lives, context and aspirations of the community.

It is essential that while governing boards strive to be diverse, they also seek to diversify their opinions by consulting and engaging stakeholders, and that the board acknowledges the diversity of its student and parent populations. Governing boards should also think about how they can tailor their approaches to engaging with parents to fit the demographics of their school(s).

For example, if your school has a higher number of EAL pupils (where their family's first language is not English), it is likely there may be language barriers which prevent parents from contacting and interacting with the school. Tackling and identifying why particular groups of parents do not engage can be instrumental in ensuring your board is engaging with all parents, not just a select few.

For more information about Everyone on Board visit: www.nga.org.uk/everyone-on-board

Top tips: conducting a successful parent survey

1

Promote your survey

Inform parents of the upcoming survey through the school's newsletter, website and social media to encourage as many parents as possible to take part, explaining why their views matter.

2

Offering different ways to complete the survey

An online survey allows parents to fill it in at a time suitable for them – this can also help when it comes to analysing the data. While it may be more time-consuming, you can also send a paper copy home with each pupil to increase your sample size.

3

Get the right data

Ensure that you are gathering qualitative data (i.e. textual and in-depth feedback) as well as quantitative (numbers and 'tick box' responses). While quantitative data is useful for producing key statistics, seeking 'any further comments' responses are an invaluable opportunity to identify issues that might otherwise go undetected.

4

Seek opinions on changes the school has already made

This can help your board understand whether or not initiatives have been successful, and canvass further ideas to improve it if required. You can also ask parents for their preferred method of consultation and communication to evaluate the popularity of your current methods.

5

Do not forget to use your results

All results should feed back into the school improvement plan and can be used later as evidence of the effectiveness of the plan.

3.2: Questions governing boards should ask

Knowing your school(s) well and asking the right challenging questions are two of the eight elements of effective governance. In order to challenge the school effectively and constructively to improve practice and outcomes, governors must be able to ask difficult and challenging questions to hold the executive to account.

The below questions can be posed to senior leaders and the board within governing board meetings in order to probe and monitor current methods of stakeholder engagement.

These questions are generic and will need to be adapted to suit the context of individual schools. It is also important to recognise that this is not an exhaustive list, and follow-up questions may lead your board to dig deeper on specific issues. They may, however, provide a helpful starting point for discussion at meetings.

Questions for governing boards to ask on parental engagement	
1	Are we meeting the statutory requirements on publishing information?
2	How, when and why does the school communicate with parents?
3	Do we ensure that parents are made aware of any changes taking place in school?
4	When did we last engage with parents to gather their views?
5	What did the results show and what impact did this have?
6	How does the school improvement plan take account of parents' views?
7	Is it easy for parents to get in touch with the school?
8	Are parents directed to Ofsted's Parent View website?
9	Should governors carry out focus groups to find out more?
10	What is done to encourage parents to help their children learn, and how does the school support this?
11	Why are parents choosing – or not choosing – our school?
12	Why do children leave the school before their final year?
13	How are parents informed about their child's behaviour (bad/good) and what methods are used to engage them (parents)?
14	What complaints have we had from parents and what action was taken as a result?
15	Have we taken into account the views of parents, pupils and staff when developing our vision?
16	How can parents help us achieve this school strategy or plan?

For further questions to explore, NGA members can visit nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre

3.3: Success Stories

Burdett-Coutts and Townsend Primary, London

School governors instigated a project to encourage parents to give views about the school by completing Ofsted's *Parent View*.

Pupils were trained to guide their parents through the process on school iPads, donated by trustees and the school's PTA. *Parent View* sessions were also offered at morning drop-off. 60 responses were recorded which was a huge increase when earlier paper versions of the survey had been relied upon. *Parent View* provided the board with valuable insight from parents that governors can take into account in their future planning.

RSA Academy, Tipton

The school has made parent involvement a priority as part of its mission to raise aspirations, and Governors believe it's a significant factor in raising attainment.

The RSA Academy in Tipton, West Midlands, opened in 2008. Parental engagement was a priority at the beginning, as a parent council was set up straight away to give parents a voice in policy and decision-making. The academy wanted to consult parents on a wide range of issues such as behaviour policy, reports, sex and relationships education and safety, to ensure that their views were taken account by senior leaders, staff and governors. In fact, anything that parents wish to discuss can be put on the agenda. The parent council has also reviewed all the academy policies, which have direct relevance to parents.

The governing board's commitment to working in partnership with parents underpins many aspects of its work. A wide range of events are held for parents to help them to support their children's learning. The school works closely with parents in instances where their child is involved in negative behaviour and dedicated staff have been appointed to reach out to those parents who find it difficult to engage. Feedback from parents shows that they value the effort that the academy puts into working in partnership with them. Senior leaders and governors are convinced that this is time well spent, and is a significant factor in raising attainment.

“ Schools and the communities that they represent are unable to work effectively in isolation. We constantly need feedback, through ongoing dialogue that is open and transparent, from all our stakeholders, to know what is working and also, what isn't. ”

Narissa Bowles, member of the governing body

“ The parent council helps the school consult parents on the issues that affect them so their views can be taken into account. ”

Parent volunteer

St Francis Catholic Primary School, Maidstone

Governors recognised the value of PTAs to support the school community when the school was put into special measures.

After St Francis' Catholic Primary School was put into special measures by Ofsted, the governing body recognised a need to rebuild the school community as an important step towards improving the grade.

They saw the benefits that a revitalised PTA might bring. Friends of St Francis started as a new committee, succeeding three parents who had been running it for years.

The newly-formed PTA worked to welcome parents and build relationships with teachers and governors. They kept an open dialogue with the school leadership to ensure that everything they did was for the benefit of the school. The governors were also keen for the PTA to focus on building a community that encompassed all families, including ones from further afield.

The parents', pupils', governors' and PTA volunteers' work has paid off, and a combined effort helped the school on its way to being re-graded as 'good' in January 2015.

St Bede's secondary school, Redhill, Surrey

Governors supported parental engagement by commissioning a survey of pupils' parents which was followed up a year later with another survey to measure the impact of their initiatives over the course of the previous year.

The first survey led to the development of a weekly newsletter to parents, and more parents using the school's website. With the backing of governors, parents were invited to tour the school with student guides and there were more parent evenings and mornings with information targeted at different groups of parent.

One year on, the second survey was commissioned and the results showed that parents were much happier with the school. Their two main issues had been addressed: communication to parents had improved and visibility of the headteacher around the school had been addressed. The second survey revealed a desire for better buildings for pupils; an issue the governors are considering.

“As well as providing welcome resources, the PTA is a powerful and supportive forum for parents and extended families within our school. I would like to continue to see stronger links forged between the PTA and governing body.”

Richard Ashton, governor

“It's so much better to be actively listening to parents and other stakeholders. In inviting parents to the school, they can now appreciate our constraints and we theirs.”

Victoria Clifford, chair of governors

Section 3

Upland Primary School, Bexley Heath

A working party of governors was set up to investigate the various models that other schools use to engage parents.

After consulting with the school's senior leadership team (SLT) and holding a coffee morning for parents, the group developed terms of reference for the resulting parent forum which involved improving communication between the school, the parents and the governing board, promoting involvement of parents in school and assisting parents in supporting their children and giving parents a voice to put their views forward.

Each school class has an elected representative tasked with gathering the views and opinions of parents of pupils in that class, which they feedback at regular Parent Partnership meetings. The forum chair organises two meetings per term. The partnership is able to invite members of staff to their

meetings to present, and the SLT and GB have an opportunity to add items to the agenda. A governor is present at every meeting to support and advise the reps and ensure that all discussions are focussed. Parents are prompted to give their thoughts on upcoming topics through letters which are also available on the school website and the minutes are published on the school website and successful outcomes highlighted.

The Upland Parent Partnership is recognised as a consultative and advisory body to the governors, and the governing board is updated with a progress report at each full meeting. It gives governors a better understanding of how parents feel, and governors use the information obtained to assist in formulating the strategic direction of the school. Gaining an understanding of their child's education enables parents to be more involved and ultimately benefits their children.

Upland Primary School won a special commendation in NGA's Outstanding Governance Awards 2015.

Section 4

Further support

If you are looking for more information there are a range of resources available from NGA, Parentkind and others. A selection of suggestions are shown here.

NGA, Governing board annual report to parents

www.nga.org.uk/annual-report-to-parents

NGA, Knowing your school: questions for governing boards to ask

www.nga.org.uk/questions-for-governing-boards-to-ask

NGA, Moving MATs forward: the power of governance

www.nga.org.uk/moving-MATS-forward

Parentkind, Blueprint for parent-friendly schools

<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/Research--Policy/Projects/Blueprint-for-Parent-Friendly-Schools>

Parentkind, Why parents matter

<https://www.parentkind.org.uk/For-Schools/Why-parents-matter>

Department for Education, Review of best practice in parental engagement

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/review-of-best-practice-in-parental-engagement>

Education Endowment Foundation, Parental engagement

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/school-themes/parental-engagement/>

Sutton Trust, Parent power (2018)

<https://www.suttontrust.com/research-paper/parent-power-2018-schools/>

If you have any stories about how your governing board has successfully engaged with parents or has overcome the challenges of parental engagement that you would like to share with us, please email hannah.garrington@nga.org.uk.