



National College for  
Teaching & Leadership

# Leading governors: The role of the chair of governors in schools and academies

## Foreword

We owe a huge debt of thanks to the thousands of people who give so freely of their time and energy to chair the governing bodies of our schools. It's a vital role that has a significant impact on the overall success of the school, as well as the effectiveness of its governance.

I am passionate about improving the governance of our schools. For an organisation to have strong and effective governance, it must have a strong and effective chair. It is essential that we have the right people with the right skills chairing our governing bodies. Such people do not often come ready-made for the role; good succession planning and high quality training and development is vital.

I am delighted that during 2013–14 we have been able to invest in a significant expansion of the work that the National College for Teaching and Leadership does to support and train governors. We have new training workshops for governors, a growing number of national leaders of governance and will soon launch a new training programme for clerks. While its remit has broadened to some very important new areas, at the heart of NCTL's work remains the Chair of Governors' Leadership Development Programme. Over 2,400 aspiring, vice or existing chairs of governors have now completed or started the programme, which has itself recently been thoroughly refreshed.

We now have a growing number of governing bodies chaired by more confident and empowered leaders and we have a growing body of knowledge and expertise across the country in how to equip and develop those leaders. This *Leading governors* resource captures all the key messages. I am delighted, but not surprised, that since it was first published in September 2012 it has remained among the most highly sought after NCTL resources. I am sure this updated edition will continue to be of great value to chairs and those that work with and support them.



**Lord Nash**

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools

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## Introduction

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Welcome to the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) and to this booklet, which explores the role of the chair of governors.

Being a chair of governors is a key leadership role and governing bodies are central to the effectiveness and accountability of schools. To quote the *Governors' handbook*, published by the Department for Education, governors "are the strategic leaders of our schools and have a vital role to play in making sure every child gets the best possible education".

The revised Ofsted framework, for the inspection of schools in England, includes a focus on quality of leadership and management, including governors. The quality of governance is now a significant part of the overall judgement about how effectively and efficiently a school is led and managed. The role of the chair of governors, leading the governing body, is pivotal to the leadership of the school. The chair works in partnership with the headteacher while holding him/her to account.

More broadly, in an increasingly autonomous education system good governance is essential. Many schools are taking advantage of the freedoms and greater autonomy available to them, and governing bodies are making a range of significant decisions: these include whether or not to federate with other schools, become a free school, an academy or a multi-academy trust (MAT), or join a chain of schools or a teaching school alliance. The role of the chair of governors, in supporting the governing body to reach these decisions, is vitally important.

NCTL has a key role in supporting and providing training for chairs of governors. Working with the National Governors Association (NGA) and drawing on the expertise of experienced and highly skilled chairs of governors, NCTL has developed a package of support for governors. This includes the Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme, governor workshops on key policy issues, such as performance-related pay (PRP), RAISEonline and financial efficiencies, resources about how to conduct a review of governance and a new training programme for clerks, available from June 2014. The role of national leader of governance (NLG) has been created to complement the other NCTL system leadership roles, with the aim of providing support and challenge to chairs of governors in schools and academies that are seeking to raise their performance. An essential feature of the NLG role is to provide governor-to-governor coaching and mentoring – support that in the past has often not been nationally available. At the back of this booklet you will find details of all the programmes offered by NCTL.

The booklet contains a number of case studies which reflect and illustrate the work of experienced chairs of governors. All the chairs of governors profiled in the case studies stress the importance of never losing sight of why they do the job: they are committed to improving and raising standards in their schools, so that the children and young people in them will progress to their full potential.

Whether you are a chair of governors or a governor, we hope you will find this resource helpful in promoting, developing and sustaining effective governance in your school.



**Charlie Taylor**  
Chief Executive, NCTL



**Emma Knights**  
Chief Executive, NGA

## Role of the chair

2/23

Being a chair of governors is a key role in the leadership and management of schools. To be effective, you need a good understanding of the role and its responsibilities so that your school gains maximum benefit from the work that you do.

An effective chair of governors:

- works with the headteacher to promote and maintain high standards of educational achievement
- ensures that the governing body sets a clear vision, ethos and strategic direction for the school
- with the governing body holds the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and for the performance management of staff
- ensures oversight of the financial performance of the school and effective use of the schools resources

You also need to ensure that all governors understand the role and responsibilities of the governing body, which can vary slightly depending on the type of school such as voluntary aided, foundation, academy, multi-academy or federation. For more information, see the NGA publication *Welcome to Governance*.

The key roles of the chair, outlined below, are explored in the following pages:

- **Leading effective governance:** giving the governing body a clear lead and direction, ensuring that the governors work as an effective team and understand their accountability and the part they play in the strategic leadership of the school and in driving school improvement.
- **Building the team:** attracting governors with the necessary skills and ensuring that tasks are delegated across the governing body so that all members contribute, and feel that their individual skills, knowledge and experience are well used and that the overall workload is shared.
- **Relationship with the headteacher:** Being a critical friend by offering support, challenge and encouragement, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring the headteacher's performance management is rigorous and robust; a good comparison is with the role of the chair of a board of trustees who works with the chief executive of an organisation but does not run day-to-day operations.
- **Improving your school:** ensuring school improvement is the focus of all policy and strategy and that governor scrutiny, monitoring and challenge reflect school improvement priorities.
- **Leading the business:** ensuring that statutory requirements and regulations are met, that the school provides value for money in its use of resources and that governing body business is conducted efficiently and effectively.

The chair plays a crucial role in setting the culture of the governing body and is first among equals, but has no individual power. The governing body is a corporate entity and its power and authority rest with the governing body as a whole. On occasions, the chair may need to take chair's action in an emergency, but any such action must be reported to the whole governing body as soon as possible.

Managing your time effectively is important to ensure you have the capacity to do what the chair alone, needs to do. Generally being chair should take up no more than 20 days a year, equal to about half a day for each week of term-time. Take time, with the headteacher and governors, to set priorities and focus your work on these.

NCTL's leadership development provision for chairs of governors addresses these key aspects of the chair's role.

For more information go to [www.gov.uk/school-governors-professional-development](http://www.gov.uk/school-governors-professional-development) **#chairs-of-governors-leadership-development-programme**

## Leading effective governance

4/23

*The effectiveness of a governing body depends on the quality of its governors and the ways in which they work together and with school leaders.*

Governors' handbook, DfE, 2014

As chair, leading the governing body and working in partnership with the headteacher, you are responsible for driving school improvement. Key responsibilities of the governing body include ensuring the clarity, vision and strategic direction of the school, holding senior leaders to account, and ensuring that the school achieves the aims and ambitions it has for its pupils. The work that you do has the ability to transform a school and the lives of the children in it. A thorough understanding of the school is crucial. You need to know its context, its strengths and weaknesses, what it does well and where it needs to improve.

An essential element of your role is to ensure that governors understand the part they play in this and regularly assess whether they are doing their job effectively. In particular, it is important that governors understand that their role is strategic rather than operational. Governors set the school's strategic framework and ensure that it meets all of its statutory duties. They should not be drawn into direct involvement in operational matters and the detail of the day-to-day management of the school, which are the responsibility of the headteacher and senior leaders. School leaders should not be micromanaged and it is part of the chair's role to ensure that the governing body understands this difference between strategic and operational decision-making.

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out 10 key questions that it recommends governors ask to better understand and challenge their school's performance:

1. What are the school's values? Are they reflected in our long-term development plans?
2. How are we going to raise standards for all children, including the most and least able, those with special educational needs, boys and girls, and any who are currently underachieving?
3. Have we got the right staff and the right development and reward arrangements?
4. Do we have a sound financial strategy, get good value for money and have robust procurement and financial systems?
5. Do we keep our buildings and other assets in good condition and are they well used?
6. How well does the curriculum provide for and stretch all pupils?
7. How well do we keep parents informed and take account of their views?
8. Do we keep children safe and meet statutory health and safety and safeguarding requirements?
9. How is pupil behaviour and attendance? Do we tackle the root causes of poor behaviour?
10. Do we offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities which engage all pupils?

Effective governance also requires:

- governors with a good mix of skills, knowledge and experience, and with a strong commitment to the school and its pupils, who are able to work together in a way that reflects the vision and ethos of the school
- governors with a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and in particular their accountability and the difference between the role in strategic rather than operational decision-making
- good communications and meetings that are well organised and where everyone can contribute and be heard
- a shared workload so that the governing body acts as a corporate body
- a good relationship between governors and the headteacher and school leadership team; the chair and headteacher should model this effective relationship

A chair of a governing body of a maintained school needs to be familiar with the *Governors' handbook* (DfE, updated 2014). Chairs of academy boards must be familiar with the corresponding law for academies, and the academy's own funding agreement and articles of association.

## Building the team

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A key part of your role as chair is to build a cohesive team of governors, delegating tasks across the governing body so that all members contribute, share responsibility for the overall workload and feel that their individual skills, knowledge and experience are well used.

Good chairs of governors set out clearly what they expect of their governors and ensure that governors' skills are regularly audited. Having identified the skills, knowledge and experience of your governors, you should ensure that any gaps are filled through training and recruitment. It is important to ensure that the governing body continues to attract and retain good governors, including governors with specialist experience as necessary.

Succession planning is also important, identifying and developing future leaders and providing them with training and development opportunities. By delegating some responsibilities – for example, ensuring that your fellow governors take the chair of committees or act as mentors to new governors – you are also helping to grow new leadership talent.

In line with good practice in corporate governance in other sectors, you will also need to take into account the importance of promoting equality and diversity when recruiting, and consider the extent to which the governing body represents the community it serves. Support for building the team and securing diversity is available from a range of organisations.

Good teamworking means that there should be clear, open and honest communication between governors at all times. Governing bodies should also undertake periodic reviews of their own effectiveness, measured against the Ofsted criteria for effective governance.

Effective chairs of governing bodies foster a culture of self-evaluation and review. They are approachable, readily accessible to other governors and take the issues they raise and the ideas they have seriously.

Finally, a governing body needs a code of practice that outlines its role and responsibilities. The NGA has developed a Code of Practice for School Governors (NGA, 2013) that can be adapted to suit the circumstances of your school.

## Checklist

- Have all new governors been properly inducted? See *Welcome to Governance* (NGA, 2014).
- How recently have you audited the skills of your governing body? See the *Model Skills Audit* available through NGA.
- Have you carried out a recent review of your effectiveness, evaluating your performance against the Ofsted criteria for effective governance or against the '20 questions for a governing body to ask itself' published by the All-party parliamentary group on education governance and leadership?
- Which of your governors has accountancy or financial management experience? Do you need to recruit someone?
- Have you considered using SGOSS ([www.sgoss.org.uk](http://www.sgoss.org.uk)) to recruit governors?
- Is there a training link governor and have all governors attended recent, appropriate training?
- Has the governing body allocated funds from the school budget for governor development? How are these funds being used?
- How often do all governors attend meetings? Has attendance been discussed?
- Are there exit interviews with governors who leave?
- What plans are there for developing other members of the team? How are you planning for your successor? See *Succession Breeds Success* (NCOGS, 2014).
- How familiar are governors with sources of support that are available?
- Have governors considered undertaking performance reviews of members of the governing body?

## Case study 1: Building the team

8/23

### Cardinal Newman Catholic Primary School, Hersham, Surrey

Carole Ann Roycroft has been chair of governors at Cardinal Newman Catholic Primary School in Hersham, Surrey, for three years. Having previously been judged to be a good school, the Ofsted inspection at the end of July 2009, which judged the school to be only satisfactory, was a wakeup call for the governing body. Although deeply disappointed, the headteacher and governing body decided that the judgement was both a challenge and an opportunity to review practice, embrace change and raise standards.

For governors this involved, initially, a review of the governing body structure and organisation, including a complete overhaul of committees and terms of reference to improve their effectiveness.

Carole Ann says: "This was the first step in our journey and when I became chair in September 2010, I began a full review of our effectiveness, training and strategic role in the school. My first task was to meet with the head and discuss my thoughts and plans with her, gaining her support. I then met with all the governors individually, sharing my thoughts and plans with them and asking the questions:

- How did they see their role and what prevented them from fulfilling it?
- What training did they need?
- Did they feel able to commit to the work of the governing body, even if this required more time and energy?
- Did they understand the last Ofsted report and what it told us as governors? Were they prepared to help the head, senior leadership team (SLT) and school achieve at least a good grading, by giving effective challenge and setting a strong strategic direction?

"The governing body, generally, responded very favourably to the challenges, although a few governors did step down. A major development was the first strategic away day for governors and senior leaders, as we began to come together to work as a team. The result of that meeting was a clear vision and objectives for our school, including a long-term strategic plan which had the final aim of achieving an outstanding grade from Ofsted, but more importantly, an outstanding education for our children.

"While this was the start of our journey, the governors were already beginning to work in a more effective manner. We undertook a skills audit, to identify training needs and gaps in our expertise; we used small 'task and finish' working groups to manage areas of challenge, for example succession planning for governors and teachers; we undertook a complete overhaul of ICT; we reviewed the use of meetings, reduced agendas and time managed each item to keep meetings on time and more effective; we used part of a full governing

body meeting for whole governing body training on important issues such as RAISEonline and finance; we reviewed our monitoring practices and set out a monitoring policy, which is reviewed regularly and reflects changing practices; we set out a formal induction policy for new governors, which is reviewed bi-annually; policies are reviewed offline and agreed at meetings; our clerk was supported in her training needs and given her first appraisal.

“Governors now have a learning platform to make all documents fully accessible. Communication with parents is a priority with termly letters from chair/vice chair and there is a more visible presence of governors around the school and at school events such as parent evenings.

“What has become particularly important is that all governors accept responsibility for their role on the governing body. They are active on their committees and, most importantly, work together. No one person has control, including the chair, ensuring that different governors take responsibility for the working groups and each governor feels valued for their work.”

In December 2012, Cardinal Newman was judged by Ofsted to be good. Inspectors commented that governors know the school well and provide robust challenge and support. The headteacher and governing body are confident that the school is on its way to becoming outstanding.

## Relationship with the headteacher

10/23

The relationship between the chair and the headteacher is one of the most important working relationships in the school and is crucial to effective governance. As school leaders you should work in close partnership, while recognising and respecting your differing roles and responsibilities.

A strong and visible working relationship between the headteacher and chair creates a culture which recognises that the school leadership team includes all school and governor leaders and encourages openness, support and challenge throughout the school.

An effective working relationship with the headteacher allows the chair to act as a critical friend, offering challenge, support, advice and encouragement as required.

As chair, it is your responsibility to ensure that there is rigorous and robust performance management of the headteacher, including setting relevant targets that contribute towards school improvement.

Meeting regularly is important, particularly when either the chair or the headteacher is new, but weekly face-to-face meetings are not obligatory and meetings can be supplemented by telephone conversations or email. It is up to you to devise a system that works for you both, given all your other commitments. You also need to ensure that all governors know and have some links with the headteacher, otherwise the relationship between headteacher and chair can appear exclusive. This can also aid in finding your successor as chair; it is important that the same pair of headteacher and chair do not continue to lead a school indefinitely.

Strategic decision-making is carried out by the governing body, drawing on proposals from the headteacher. Unless given a very specific role by the governing body, chairs do not have decision-making powers as individuals. It is useful to share with your governing body the publication, *What governing bodies can expect from their school leaders and what school leaders can expect from their governing bodies* (NGA, ASCL and NAHT).

The chair needs to ensure that the headteacher's performance management is carried out, including the annual appraisal and objective setting as well as a formal mid-year review. Given the chair will be the governor with the best knowledge of the headteacher's performance, it is good practice for you to be on the panel which carries out the more formal part of the performance management annual cycle.

Some key points to consider

- Explore your expectations of the relationship with the headteacher. Are they the same or are you each making (different) assumptions?
- Do the arrangements for keeping in touch suit both parties?
- How effectively do you support, challenge and hold your headteacher to account? Could any aspects of your relationship be improved?
- In which areas of work would you and the headteacher benefit from joint training?
- How effective is performance management of the headteacher?

## Case study 2: Relationship with the headteacher

11/23

### St Andrew's Special School, Derby

Richard Betts has been chair of governors at St Andrew's Special School in Derby since 2004. St Andrew's is a mixed day and residential school for young people aged 11–19 years with severe learning difficulties. In 2012, it became a national support school (NSS) and the headteacher a national leader of education (NLE). In 2013, it became a national teaching school and chose to operate this as part of an alliance of five outstanding local schools, known as the Derby Teaching School Alliance. Its latest Ofsted inspection judged it to be outstanding for both education and residential provision. The executive headteacher is Phil Harrison.

Richard says: "I have a very strong relationship with Phil, who I appointed in 2007 on the retirement of the previous head. We share the same vision and ambitions for the school, always looking for new opportunities to extend and improve what we do and work with others. Our most recent development is a move into post-19 education, in collaboration with Derby College and Derby City Council.

"Our relationship is open, honest, frank and supportive. There is a high level of trust between us, which is important when we are exploring new ideas and developing new provision. I believe my role is to offer counsel, guidance and support, allowing Phil to be innovative and, at times, take risks.

"When he was first appointed I spent more time with Phil, but our relationship has evolved over the years and, although we still meet regularly, we are also in frequent contact by phone, texts and emails. It is very much a relationship of equals, based on mutual respect. Working together, we have always been very clear about our respective roles and also the boundaries: for example I am careful never to be operational or interfere in the day-to-day running of the school.

"We balance each other well and have complementary skills. With my private sector background – I have worked for Rolls-Royce since 1990 in a range of roles around HR and communications – I bring something else to the party, different skills and a different perspective. Phil is very good at reaching out to people to get multi-agency partners on board and he has very good relationships with all our stakeholders. My contribution is to be more evaluative and analytical, challenging and supporting in equal measure.

"A key feature of our relationship is a rigorous appraisal process. [As governors] we set robust and challenging objectives for Phil, which we review regularly. Phil and I see this very much as our opportunity for reflection and review, but also for governors, the process is a means of holding the headteacher to account.

"The strong working relationship between Phil and me sets the ethos for the way in which staff and governors work throughout the school. We talk through everything, always aiming to reach a consensus. And the governing body works in the same way. I very much believe that our strong partnership has enabled our school to be the outstanding and dynamic school it is today."

## Improving your school

12/23

As chair, you need to have a thorough understanding and knowledge of your school: its context, the characteristics of the area it serves and the children and families who make up the school's intake.

The governing body sets the vision and strategic direction for the school and needs to know what the school does well, where its strengths lie and where there is room for improvement. Important questions are:

- How ambitious are we for our schools and our pupils?
- How well do we hold the school to account for pupils' achievement?
- What are the school's strengths and weaknesses and how are we addressing them?
- What is the quality of the teaching and how do we secure outstanding learning and teaching for every pupil?
- How good is our curriculum and does it offer rich opportunities for high quality learning?
- How aware are we of the impact of teaching on learning and progress, in different subjects and different groups of pupils?
- Is behaviour and attendance good and how safe are our children?
- How well do we engage with parents?
- How effective and efficient are we in deploying the school's resources?
- What sort of academy or school do we need to become?

Effective monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is an essential part of school improvement. As chair, you and your governor colleagues will want to ensure that the school has a positive culture and effective processes relating to self-evaluation.

You should ensure that good quality and relevant information is available to governors. You all need a good understanding of the data and other sources of evidence that are available to you. These include:

- Ofsted School Data Dashboard
- DfE school and college performance tables
- RAISEonline
- Fischer Family Trust and its dashboard for governors
- school exam results (SATs, GCSEs and A-levels)
- headteacher reports to the governing body, which should include information about pupil learning and progress, admission, attendance and exclusions, the quality of teaching and staff recruitment, retention and morale

- school self-evaluation form (SEF), which is no longer compulsory but still used in schools for compiling performance information
- results of lesson observations, work scrutiny, and pupil voice, including interviews; the chair has an important role here in supporting the headteacher to establish a culture and process of monitoring and self-evaluation
- progress against the key performance indicators that the governing body set in the school strategy,
- parent, student and staff surveys
- school visits by governors

## Checklist

- Is the headteacher's report to your governing body structured around the priorities of the school strategic plan, and does it provide the information governors need to effectively hold the school to account?
- Is your governing body involved in monitoring progress against the key objectives in the school strategic plan?
- Does your governing body have the skills to understand and question the data being presented?
- Does your governing body have access to independent advice on what the data means or to confirm the quality of teaching?
- Did the governors speak to the Ofsted inspectors and receive a report from them?
- Does your governing body receive RAISEonline reports, and do governors have access to the RAISEonline full report?
- Does your governing body have progress data reported to it as well as attainment?
- Does your governing body know which groups of children in the school are not doing as well as they should, and why that might be?
- How does your governing body seek views from parents?
- How does your governing body seek views from pupils?
- How does your governing body seek views from staff?
- Do you have a protocol for school visits and does it make clear that the purpose of the visit is linked to the priorities set by your governing body?

More information on using data effectively is available from [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk).

## Case study 3: Improving your school

14/23

### The Streetly Academy, Sutton Coldfield. West Midlands

Roland Roberts has been chair of governors at the Streetly Academy for three years. He first joined Streetly six years ago as a member of the first governing body, following the Interim Executive Board (IEB), which had been put in place by the local authority to support the struggling school. This large secondary school has now been judged to be outstanding by Ofsted in its latest inspection at the end of 2012. It described the school as being exceptionally well led and managed and the governing body as being highly effective.

Roland says: "This has been a considerable journey for us. We were rated satisfactory by Ofsted in 2009, shortly after the new governing body replaced the IEB. Taking the school to outstanding, just three years later, is a huge achievement for everyone.

"A key task for the governing body, following the satisfactory judgement, was the recruitment of a new headteacher. This exercise meant that we had to look forward and decide what we wanted the school to be. We reviewed our values and vision for the school and set clear aims and objectives. At the same time, we also took the opportunity to reach out, proactively, to all our key stakeholders – staff, students, parents and the wider community – and meet with them to understand what they also wanted to see in the school; the first time this had ever been done.

"Once the new head was in place, he set about putting the vision and values into practice. Uniform and behaviour were successfully tackled, followed by the transforming of teaching and learning. Leadership and governance became highly focused on school improvement through raising standards. Rapid improvements in the quality of data meant that governors were better able to monitor pupil progress and the quality of teaching. The school developed an electronic monitoring system, which provides us with good information about the progress of students and helps identify strengths and weaknesses across the school. This program is now being shared with other schools in the area. Governors use the data extensively and, as a result, are able to challenge and hold senior leaders to account about performance. Ofsted noted that we routinely ask difficult questions!

"Governors take their work very seriously. We have 18 members and each governor has a clearly defined role and responsibilities. We have governors responsible for communicating with each of the stakeholder groups and we have link governors for the core subjects who have developed a set of protocols for their involvement in monitoring teaching and learning in specific areas.

"We set our agendas for the full governing body and the three committees, a year in advance. As a way of supporting continued improvements, each committee will have as its focus a key priority for the school in the coming year, for example special needs provision or sixth form development, and will review and monitor progress in these areas against agreed objectives.

“As chair of governors, a key development for me was the appointment of a full-time professional clerk. This has had a great impact on the work of governors, transformed governance and made my role so much easier.

“As a school and a governing body, we now work to support other governing bodies and chairs of governors locally and spread good practice more effectively. The school has just been appointed a teaching school, the head, a national leader of education, and I have become a national leader of governance.”

## Leading the business

16/23

Working closely with the clerk to the governors, it is the chair's responsibility to ensure that the governing body fulfils its statutory obligations and responsibilities. Governors are accountable for the responsible and effective use of the school's resources. Three principles underpin the DfE approach to the reform of maintained school and academy governance. It has high expectations of governing bodies and their role in school improvement and accountability; it aims to give them greater freedom in how they constitute and operate to meet these expectations. There is a clear and robust system of accountability to drive up the quality of governing bodies. The DfE feels that transparency is fundamental to empowered leadership and accountable decision making; transparency is also needed on what is expected of governors and on the performance of their schools

In September 2013, the Department for Education introduced new advice for maintained schools, in relation to, The School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) Regulations 2013. It covers governing body procedures, terms of reference and governors'. The new regulations require the appointment of a clerk and define the role of the clerk in advising the governing body on the nature of their duties and functions. The regulations also give governing bodies the power to make arrangements for their members to be present at meetings 'virtually', for example by telephone or video conference, and therefore to participate in discussion and decision-making remotely.

The timing of governing body and committee meetings should reflect statutory requirements, such as approving the school's budget. An effective governing body will review its committee structure annually, to make sure it matches the school's needs.

Governing body meetings should have a formal agenda. Minutes of the previous meeting and additional papers must be sent out at least seven days before a meeting, so that governors have a chance to prepare. As chair, you must prepare in advance for the meeting, ensuring the agenda is focused on the school's key priorities, and that the data and information provided enables the governing body to carry out its core functions of holding the headteacher and senior leaders to account.

Chairing a meeting is a key skill and people will operate in different ways with varying degrees of formality. The essential elements are to ensure that all members have the opportunity to contribute and are listened to, discussions are open and honest, and decisions are fair and transparent.

Governing bodies should adopt a code of practice setting out the roles and expectations so that governors understand their responsibilities and the way in which the governing body conducts its business. The National Governors' Association has a model version you can adapt (NGA, 2013).

With the emergence of different models of school – federations, academies and chains, for example – governance responsibilities are changing and new ones are emerging. Statutory guidance on the different models of governance is available from the Department for Education. The National College for Teaching and Leadership has also produced two new resources on the governance of multi-academy trusts (MATs) and federations.

## Checklist

- Is your governing body's business focused on the priorities in the school strategic plan?
- Do governors receive the information and data they need to ask the right questions, and hold the headteacher and senior leaders to account, for improving school performance and raising standards?
- Is your school's self-evaluation process robust and is the governing body appropriately engaged at a strategic level in the whole process?
- Does your clerk have a job description and do you manage the clerk's performance?
- Is your clerk accredited? If not, consider this route (for further details, see [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)).
- Do you receive all papers seven days in advance of meetings?
- Are meetings effectively run, focusing on key priorities, and allowing everyone to participate and do their job well?
- Do you spend too much meeting time reviewing policies and checking compliance rather than monitoring the impact on the children?
- Does the vice-chair share some of the chair's business?
- Is your governing body having an impact on school standards?
- Have you carried out an impact assessment? See for example the Governor Mark framework (GLM Partnership, 2013) or the *Governor Self-Evaluation Tracker* at [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk).

## Case study 4: Leading the business

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### West Jesmond Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne

Jane Edminson has been chair of governors at West Jesmond Primary School for three years. In February 2014, the governing body was awarded Governor Mark for outstanding governance, as a result of their systematic approach to planning and school improvement. In giving the award, the Governor Mark panel commented on the high quality of governance and the clear way in which governing body and committee agendas are focused on the annual cycle within the school's strategic plan. At the school's last inspection in 2010, Ofsted inspectors also commented that governors fulfil their responsibilities outstandingly well and make a very strong contribution to the development of the school.

Jane says: "A key feature of the way we work is a systems approach to the identification of key priorities and agenda planning. This system was co-created with Heaton Manor, a large local secondary school, where I am also a governor.

"At the end of the school year, the governors and senior leadership meet to review the past year, including our achievements as governors and the impact of our work. We then set priorities for the year ahead. The priorities are aligned to the school development plan and, once agreed, they dictate the work of the committees and governing body for the coming year.

"As chair of governors, I then work to create a grid which maps the business of the five committees and the full governing body against the agreed priorities, and details their agendas for the year ahead. From the outset of each school year, we therefore have annual agenda plans for all committees, covering all aspects of the school development plan and allowing for discussion and update points, linked monitoring plans and linked briefing sessions at full governing body.

"Each term, the school business manager and the committee clerks can then prepare the committee agendas following the timetable set out in the grid, so everyone knows what to expect. In addition to the statutory business, the agendas' main focus will be on the identified priorities, with monitoring of progress against milestones and expected outcomes taking place. Updates from the headteacher and senior leaders are built into the school reporting cycle, so that there is no duplication of effort."

These updates include subject leader reports, pupil progress data and attendance. The chair sees that including them means that staff do not have to prepare these separately and the governing body are kept informed of all business matters.

"I argue that this helps me do my job as chair more easily and more efficiently – the hard work is done up front at the end of the summer term and from a governance point of view nothing is missed."

# How the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) can help you

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NCTL, with its partners, has developed training and support that is available for all chairs of governors and organisations to use. It is delivered locally through licensed providers.

## Leadership development provision

The Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme was launched in 2012 and draws on what really effective chairs of governors do, including:

- ensuring the governing body makes a difference and improves the school
- putting the accountability role of the governing body into practice
- leading the team of governors and managing the business of the governing body

This successful leadership development provision also includes mentoring support, and a self-assessment tool, to identify your areas for development as a current or future chair of governors.

The Clerks Development Programme was launched in 2014 and draws on what really effective chairs of governors do in order to raise the bar and so support effective governance. It has been designed for new and experienced clerks in all settings and includes; mentoring support, and a self-assessment tool, to identify areas for development, group sessions and self-directed learning.

Training workshops and materials for all governors are available on Performance Related pay (PRP), RAISE online and financial efficiencies.

Scholarships are available for participants. Please see the following website for more details [www.gov.uk/school-governors-professional-development](http://www.gov.uk/school-governors-professional-development)

## School-led support

Building on the success of the College's programmes for national leaders of education (NLEs), local leaders of education (LLEs) and national support schools (NSSs), we have worked with governor associations, local authorities and dioceses to develop outstanding chairs of governors to play a system leadership role as national leaders of governance (NLGs). This role is targeted on school improvement and involves working with chairs of governors who are working in schools in challenging circumstances, and supporting those new to the role. Support from NLGs is free and is nationally available, supported schools are asked to feedback on the coaching and mentoring that they receive in order that NCTL can ensure the service is high quality and improves school governance.

If you are interested in finding out more about the training and support that NLGs offer, please email [governors@education.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:governors@education.gsi.gov.uk)

## Key contacts

### Department for Education

The Department for Education (DfE) offers a range of information and advice for governors of all types of school, from guidance on the law and constitution of the governing body to committees, training and year planning.

[www.gov.uk/schools-colleges/governance](http://www.gov.uk/schools-colleges/governance)

### National Governors' Association

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is an independent membership organisation that represents school governors of maintained schools and academies in England. Its aim is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting high standards in all our schools, and improving the effectiveness of their governing bodies.

NGA materials mentioned in this document are available on the NGA website at [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk).

**Tel:** 0121 237 3780

**Email:** [governorhq@nga.org.uk](mailto:governorhq@nga.org.uk)

[www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)

### Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association (FASNA)

Freedom and Autonomy for Schools – National Association (FASNA) is a national forum for self-governing primary, secondary and special schools and academies. FASNA has an Executive Board with elections structured to ensure equal representation of primary and secondary representatives, including heads and governors as well as clerks to governing bodies.

**Tel:** 0115 917 0142

**Email:** [admin@fasna.org.uk](mailto:admin@fasna.org.uk)

[www.fasna.org.uk](http://www.fasna.org.uk)

## GovernorLine

GovernorLine offers free, confidential advice, information and support to school governors, clerks and individuals involved directly in the governance of maintained schools in England.

The service is free, seven days a week, from 9am to 10pm on weekdays, and from 11am to 4pm at weekends.

**Tel:** 08000 722 181

**[www.education.gov.uk/a0064505/governorline-helping-you-helping-your-school](http://www.education.gov.uk/a0064505/governorline-helping-you-helping-your-school)**

## Independent Academies Association

The Independent Academies Association (IAA) is a national body representing state-funded independent schools. A membership association, it brings academy leaders together, runs events and represents members' views on education policy to ministers.

**Tel:** 0115 942 1238

**Email:** [iaainfo@iaa.uk.net](mailto:iaainfo@iaa.uk.net)

**[www.iaa.uk.net](http://www.iaa.uk.net)**

## National Co-ordinators of Governor Services

National Co-ordinators of Governor Services (NCOGS) represents local authority providers of services to school governors. It is a source of good practice in training, materials and support services regionally, and also lobbies national bodies on governance issues.

**[www.ncogs.org.uk](http://www.ncogs.org.uk)**

## SGOSS

SGOSS (formally School Governors' One Stop Shop) is an independent charity dedicated to recruiting volunteers with added-value skills and helping place them on school governing bodies across England. Its services are free to volunteers, employers, schools and local authorities.

**Tel:** 020 7354 9805

**Email:** [info@sgoss.org.uk](mailto:info@sgoss.org.uk)

**[www.sgoss.org.uk](http://www.sgoss.org.uk)**

Schools featured in the case studies:

- Cardinal Newman Catholic Primary School, Surrey -  
[www.cardinal-newman.surrey.sch.uk/page/?title=Home&pid=1](http://www.cardinal-newman.surrey.sch.uk/page/?title=Home&pid=1)
- St Andrew's Special School, Derby  
<http://standrewschool.co.uk/>
- The Streetly Academy, Sutton Coldfield  
[www.thestreetlyschool.co.uk/](http://www.thestreetlyschool.co.uk/)
- West Jesmond Primary School, Newcastle upon Tyne  
[www.westjesmondprimary.org.uk/](http://www.westjesmondprimary.org.uk/)

## Published resources

23/23

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DfE, 2011, *Schools Financial Value Standard*, London, Department for Education. Available to download from [www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-and-assurance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-financial-value-standard-and-assurance)

GLM Partnership, 2013, *GLM Quality Mark for School Governance*, Birmingham, National Governors' Association & Co-ordinators of Governor Services. Available to download at [www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Useful-Resources/Governor-Mark.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/Members-Area/Useful-Resources/Governor-Mark.aspx)

NCOGS, 2007, *Succession Breeds Success: How to grow leaders in your governing body*, Co-ordinators of Governor Services & School Governors' One-Stop Shop. Available to download at [www.ncogs.org.uk/resources.php](http://www.ncogs.org.uk/resources.php)

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NGA, 2014 *The Chair's Handbook*, A comprehensive guide for chairs of governing bodies, Birmingham, National Governors' Association. Available to order online at [www.nga.org.uk/Publications.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/Publications.aspx)

NGA, 2013, *Code of Practice for School Governors 2012/13*, Birmingham, National Governors' Association. Available to download at [www.nga.org.uk/About-Us/Policies/Code-of-Practice.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/About-Us/Policies/Code-of-Practice.aspx)

NGA, *What governing bodies can expect from their school leaders and what school leaders can expect from their governing bodies*. Available to view at [www.naht.org.uk/EasysiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=9650](http://www.naht.org.uk/EasysiteWeb/getresource.axd?AssetID=9650)

NGA, *Model Skills Audit*. Available for NGA members to download at [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk)

Ofsted, 2014, *School inspection handbook*, Ofsted. Available to download at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/school-inspection-handbook)

Ofsted, 2011, *School governance: Learning from the best*, Ofsted. Available to download at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/good-practice-resource-%E2%80%93-school-governance-learning-best)

Ofsted, 2014, *Subsidiary guidance: Supporting the inspection of maintained schools and academies*, Ofsted. Available to download at [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/subsidiary-guidance-supporting-inspection-of-maintained-schools-and-academies](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/subsidiary-guidance-supporting-inspection-of-maintained-schools-and-academies)

Target Tracker, *Governor Self-Evaluation Tracker*. Available [www.targettracker.org/gset](http://www.targettracker.org/gset)

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**National College for Teaching and Leadership**  
Triumph Road  
Nottingham NG8 1DH

T. 0345 609 0009  
E. [college.enquiries@bt.com](mailto:college.enquiries@bt.com)

[www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege](http://www.education.gov.uk/nationalcollege)