

## **JOINT BOARD OF EDUCATION**

### **Coronavirus Guidance to Governing Boards (COVID-19)**

**Dated: 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

Coronavirus was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on the 11 March 2020. It is now a major concern for school leaders monitoring and dealing with the risks and implications in an evolving situation.

Governing boards will undoubtedly share the concerns of their school leaders and will want to give support in these challenging circumstances. They will want assurance that their schools are responding appropriately to the risks and implications of the Coronavirus.

#### **Context**

The increasing threat presented to the UK by the Covid-19 virus, and the evolving advice from central government, has resulted in queries from governing boards. These questions, in the main relate to what governing boards should do now that continuing to hold face-to-face meetings conflicts with social distancing advice.

This advice has been created to assist governing boards.

#### **Considerations:**

Some of the key considerations are:

1. The health and well-being of school staff (including Headteachers and staff governors)
2. The health and well-being of governors, taking account of age, health, maternity and governors' families' health.
3. The need to protect school communities as far as possible
4. Do governors have access to technology that will facilitate virtual meetings/alternative participation?
5. Are chair's actions understood by all?

All governing boards in academy trusts and maintained schools should question if meetings need to go ahead: if the decision is that a meeting is required, as decisions need to be made, boards should then reflect on:

- Is it sensible for the board need to meet face-to-face?
- Can a quorate, virtual meeting be held as an alternative?
- Is it possible to conduct business off-line/remotely?
- Can Chair's Actions be used as an alternative to meeting?

Even if your board has previously decided not to permit alternative participation in meetings, given the seriousness of the current situation, we believe moving to virtual meetings in the short term is a responsible, sensible and reasonable response.

Whilst some governors may have no access to technology, provided a virtual meeting is quorate, it can proceed.

Chair's Actions should only be used to make decisions in situations where failure to do so could result in detriment to the school, pupils, staff or the wider community. If the chair takes any actions, on behalf of the governing board, these must be recorded and reported back to the governing board at its next full meeting.

## **Q & A**

*Who can decide to cancel/postpone a meeting?*

In the current circumstances common sense should prevail and if there is any risk by proceeding with a meeting, this falls under chair's actions. It would, of course, be sensible for chair, headteacher and clerk to work closely on the decision and ensure all governors receive notification to cancel or postpone a meeting.

*What issues/matters could be agreed under chair's actions?*

There are many examples, but the general rule relates to urgency. e.g. school closure as a result of emergency relating to Covid-19, emergency expenditure on IT infrastructure to meet a deadline for the start of term; and approval of documents prior to submission in order to meet statutory dates.

*What governance business can be conducted offline?*

Whilst it is not ideal for business to be conducted off-line, reviewing of policies, approval of School Development Plan, Self-Evaluation documents etc are all examples. Good practice would always be to circulate draft documents via secure e-mail, Google docs etc. or a governor portal, ask for questions and comments, redraft, where appropriate and ask for e-mail approval. Sensitive documents containing personal data should not be shared this way. Schools and governors should continue to exercise caution and circumspection with all

documents shared electronically or in hard copy, that they do not contain personal data or any sensitive information.

Please remember, governing is **not an operational role**. The best and most appropriate way for governing boards to support their school leaders is to allow them to manage the school's response without the involvement of the board, unless it is requested.

- Closing the school is an operational decision taken by school leaders not governing boards.
- School leaders will most likely have a discussion with the chair of the governing board before taking their decision to close the school.
- The current advice from Public Health England is that no school should close in response to a suspected (or confirmed) case of Coronavirus unless directed to do so by Public Health England or under the advice of their local Public Health protection team

School leaders themselves are guided by public health advice. They should maintain levels of communication with stakeholders, most notably parents and but also the governing board.

To keep schools as safe as possible, we are advising governors not to go into school unless vital. The less people in and out of school on a daily basis is a way of protecting those in the school and their families, many of which will be vulnerable.

Consider cancelling any monitoring visits that were due to take place between now and the end of term. Monitoring visits planned for the summer term can be reviewed after Easter.

Think about Governing Board meetings that you have planned. The government is advising against any unnecessary social contact. We would advise than any meetings planned between now and the end of term are either rearranged, take place away from school premises or happen virtually. Consider the risk to governors if meeting away from school. We want to have as few people entering school as possible. Think about your governors and their risk too, many may fall into vulnerable categories.

The DfE will be releasing information about the SFVS later this week.

I produced some guidance on how to govern virtually which will go out to all our schools.

The DfE has also launched a helpline to answer questions about the Coronavirus.

- Phone: 0800 046 8687
- Email: [DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk)

Please contact Sharon Taylor – Governance Coordinator if you have any questions or concerns at all –07725 278104 or email [Sharon.taylor@portsmouth.anglican.org](mailto:Sharon.taylor@portsmouth.anglican.org).