



GST Newsletter

Issue 7 – April 2024

Introduction

Welcome back, we hope you managed to have a lovely break over Easter, although it feels some time ago now.

It has been over a year now since the establishment of **Westmorland and Furness Council**, how quickly has it went! It has been a busy time but thanks to all school staff who have carried on with the important day job of teaching our children and young people and thanks to everyone involved in delivering governance, which contributes to ensuring the best outcomes for all our children and young people.

News/updates

As well as the Department for Education (DfE) **School Governance** update, below are further items which may be of interest:

Governance Handbook Replaced

On the 7 March 2024, DfE replaced The Governance Handbook with two new governance guides:

- **Maintained Schools Governance Guide**
- **Academy Trust Governance Guide.**

The existing Governance Handbook has been archived, along with the competency frameworks for governance and clerking and the statutory policies page (which is now included in the Governance Guides).

The DfE have also made the decision to archive the separate guidance on Governance structures and roles. With the main guidance now shorter and more accessible, they believe there is no longer a need for a separate document as the content of structures and roles is already largely included in the new guidance. Any critical information will be captured in either the Governance Guides or the Academies Trust Handbook, whichever is most appropriate.



Working Together to Improve School Attendance Guidance

The DfE published updated **Working together to improve school attendance guidance** on 7 March 2024, that will come into force from 19 August 2024. Changes include expectations on supporting pupils with mental health or physical ill health, new fine rates, absence thresholds at which penalties must be considered, requirements to share daily data and new absence codes.

The summary table of responsibilities has also been updated, with a new expectation added that the governing board will *'use data to understand patterns of attendance, compare with other local schools, identify areas of progress and where greater focus is needed.'* Governors/trustees may also want to seek/question 'How are all children, including those with additional needs, being supported to maintain good levels of attendance and thrive at school?'

Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges

Find out what help you can get to develop a whole school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing

Inspecting schools: guide for maintained and academy schools

This guide provides a summary of what schools should expect and what they need to do as part of an Ofsted inspection.

Ofsted Big Listen

The Ofsted Big Listen seeks views across our work, from schools and children's social care to teacher training and early years.

In addition, Ofsted has extended its **Big Listen consultation** to hear directly from children, seeking their views of how Ofsted can improve.

Ofsted review: careers guidance in special schools

A **review** carried out by Ofsted has found that while leaders prioritise work experience and building relationships with employers, some placements lack the "knowledge or confidence" to offer learners with SEND high-quality work experience.

Focusing on careers advice in specialist settings, the review highlighted that pupil voice was "central to good careers guidance in specialist settings", as well as developing a close and trusting relationship with learners and their families.

Commenting, Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver said that "good careers guidance can help address social inequality by teaching children and young people with SEND about the full range of options available".

The National Governance association in collaboration with the Careers Enterprise Company (CEC), have provided some **resources**, **Careers Guide for Governing Boards** and a **Careers Link Role Description**, to assist board's in their role in helping all pupils make informed choices about their future.

Use of reasonable force in Alternative Provision (AP) and special schools

The DfE commissioned research to understand how special and alternative provision schools in England currently use reasonable force, to learn what these schools believe works to effectively minimise the need to use such methods.

DfE is committed to minimising the use of reasonable force, in all schools in England, including special schools and alternative provision. This work programme will include updating the 'Use of reasonable force' guidance (2013) to provide school staff with advice on how to minimise the use of reasonable force to in instances where it is absolutely necessary, lawful and as safely as possible.

Pupil Premium Guidance Updated

Amongst other updates the section on the 'purpose of pupil premium' has been amended, to reflect that "pupil premium is not a personal budget for individual pupils and schools do not have to spend pupil premium so that it solely benefits pupils who meet the funding criteria. Pupil Premium can be used to support other pupils with identified needs, or used for whole class interventions that will benefit all pupils."

Wraparound childcare guidance for schools

Explains the role of schools and academy trusts in supporting parents to access wraparound childcare.

Responding to requests for wraparound childcare Guidance

The DfE has published '**Responding to requests for wraparound childcare**' guidance for schools. The guidance is designed to support schools and trusts to understand how to respond to requests from parents, carers and providers, in relation to the national wraparound childcare programme. The guidance includes the responsibilities of the board in relation to considering whether to establish wraparound childcare on school sites.

Boards are encouraged to read this guidance alongside the **wraparound guidance for schools**.

Further education corporations and sixth-form college corporations: governance guide

Legal and regulatory requirements and recommended practice that apply to further education (FE) and sixth-form college corporations.

The updated guide added a link to local skills improvement plans statutory guidance, made updates to accountability agreements and local needs duty in 'duty to review provision' section, clarified how often boards must conduct self-assessment in 'governance reviews' section and added resources to 'Further reading' section, on positive behaviours and estate management.

Schools' costs: 2023 to 2025 technical note

This note is intended to help school leaders, governors, academy trustees, researchers and others understand the drivers of cost increases in mainstream schools in England at the national level.

National school breakfast club programme

Support for school breakfast club provision has been updated to reflect participating schools will receive the subsidy until the end of July 2025.

New PE guidance for schools strengthens equal access to sport

As set out in the updated **School Sport and Activity Action Plan** published last year, which delivered on promises made by the Prime Minister and Education Secretary to the Lionesses, the **guidance** will support schools to offer equal sporting opportunities for girls and boys, alongside a minimum of 2 hours of PE per week, helping to build a brighter future for our children.



Mandatory qualification for special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs)

From September 2009 all new SENCOs in mainstream schools have been required to take a nationally recognised award within three years of taking up their position. This award has been the 'national award for special needs co-ordinator' (NASENCO), but from September this year the new leadership level national professional qualification (NPQ) will become mandatory in place of the NASENCO.

SENCOs who have already obtained the NASENCO do not need to complete the SENCO NPQ.

However, from September 2024, all SENCOs and aspiring SENCOs will need to:

- Take the NPQ if they have not completed or started the NASENCO
- Complete training within 3 years of appointment - schools and SENCOs must make sure they enrol on training that will meet this requirement.
- School SENCOs appointed prior to September 2009 will not be required to take the NPQ, but they will be expected to comply with the regulations.

Further information can be found on the [government website](#).

Inspiring Governance - Government cut funding for governor recruitment service

DfE has announced the end of funding for Inspiring Governance, a governor and trustee recruitment service, effectively marking the end of any government funding for school and trust governance.

In Emma Knights' (Co-Chief Executive, NGA) [latest blog](#), she reflects on the growing challenge of governance volunteer recruitment and the diminishing support from the DfE for such a crucial component of the accountability system.

To make the most of the last few months available, if you are looking for governors, please do visit the [website](#) to ensure expressions of interests currently available, are transformed into filling some of the governor vacancies in Westmorland and Furness. Visiting the site today, currently there are 14 expressions of interest.

Clerking/Governance Coordinator/Governance Professional career journey

Learn more about the careers of governance professionals at **clerking level** with a new **film** featuring Tim Bennett, winner of the 2023 NGA outstanding clerk to a governing board award. Tim shares how his career began, the challenges and rewards of the role and his top tips for clerks.

You can also explore governance professional careers further using the **governance professional career pathway**, **governance co-ordinator** and the **lead governance professional** levels.

The career pathway is designed to guide you through your career and support board members when reviewing their clerking needs. There is the facility to **advertise governance professional vacancies** and check out **exciting job opportunities**.

The Education Policy Institute (EPI) publish new benchmarking tool

The EPI has launched a **research report** and **new online benchmarking tool** to help build a more rounded understanding of the performance of schools and trusts in England. It allows users to benchmark performance in relation to different school groups and structures and compare the relative strengths and weaknesses.

Benchmarking tools are invaluable for those governing, as they allow the data for your trust or school to be placed into a wider context. This benchmarked data can then be used as a starting point for detailed scrutiny and challenge of the information being provided by leaders.

Reminders

Completed the SFVS and SRMSAC?

All maintained schools and academy trusts should have submitted the schools financial value standard (SFVS) and school resource management self-assessment checklist (SRMSAC), respectively. These tools provide assurance that the school or trust is meeting the basic standards of good financial health and resource management.

NGA NEW blog: summer term agenda items:

Conduct self-evaluation

Every governing board should review its performance to identify strengths and areas where effectiveness could be improved. It is recommended that self-evaluation is completed annually – if you haven't done so already, the summer term could be an ideal time. To assist, NGA provides **governing board self-evaluation questions** to review their effectiveness and build an action plan.

You may find the NGA webinar **Governance workload: balancing efficiency and effectiveness** helpful in the process of self-evaluation as the webinar explores:

- Understanding the role and remaining strategic
- The impact of board culture
- How boards can become more efficient
- Making governance training work.

Succession Planning

Does your board have regular succession planning conversations? If not, then please note our Chairs Role – Developing Leadership session, 11 June 2024, 6pm to 7.30pm.

This virtual session provides delegates with a greater understanding of the role of the chair in leading the governing board to fulfil its strategic responsibility in delivering effective governance.

It will also consider ways in which to strengthen the team to lead to effective succession planning.

The event will consist of a presentation followed by an opportunity to ask questions.

Bookings are made via **Westmorland and Furness SLA online**.

NGA provide – a guide (**Succession planning: finding your next chair**) to help governing boards make succession planning part of their long-term practice.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Governance

Governing boards are required to do everything they can to ensure that pupils with SEND get the support they need, including looking at how resources are allocated for SEND provision and overseeing relevant policies and documents.

Every decision made by the board, consideration should be given to how that decision will impact pupils with SEND. In practice, what works well for pupils with SEND is often effective for all pupils. NGA will be exploring this approach in detail at their **upcoming webinar**.

Planning for a strategy day?

An annual cycle for schools and trusts creating, monitoring and reviewing their strategy.

If you're preparing to review strategic priorities and re-affirm the school/trust vision, NGA's **Being Strategic guidance** provides a framework (for both single schools and MATs including a strategy document template) to refer to on the day and throughout the year.



Development/Training

National Governance Association – Learning Link (NGA LL)

A reminder that Westmorland and Furness Council will be continuing funding free access to the NGA LL platform for the financial year 2024 to 2025.

Please do take advantage of this fantastic resource to help build and enhance your boards existing skills and knowledge.

You will need to register to access the platform, if you have not yet registered, instructions of how to do this and a guide to the platform can be found in this flyer [here](#).

There are a number of modules available, a full list of the current modules can be downloaded from [here](#).

What is doxing?

Every day is a day for learning for everyone. This week, I came across the word 'doxing'. It was mentioned in the context of online safety, I had not heard of it before and I was curious to know what this is. So, I did a little bit of investigation and initially I went to **Online safety in schools and colleges: Questions from the governing board** but no mention of doxing there. Then following a few other searches, I discovered that the Southwest Grid for Learning (SWGL) have published a **blog** on doxing. This, then in turn led me to **Responding to Online Reputational Issues and Harassment Directed at Schools and School staff**.

So what is doxing? In short, it is a practice where individuals or groups expose and publicise private information about a person on the internet without their consent, often for the purposes of causing distress or creating malicious intent.

This for me is an example of upskilling knowledge, and particularly relevant for members of governing boards in pulling all that information together to gain an oversight and assurance of how your school is performing.

Governance Professional/Clerk Cluster Session

Following on from our first Westmorland and Furness Governance Professional/Clerk Cluster session on 12 March 2024, the group decided to schedule future sessions on a termly basis. The group is also going to explore the possibility of holding a face to face event sometime in the future.

There are no restrictions on numbers for this virtual event, the more the merrier, details for our next session are as follows:

- 24 June 2024, 6pm to 7.30pm
- **Click here to join the meeting** Meeting ID: 359 350 724 534 Passcode: RWGR4b
- Please email GST.Mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk to confirm attendance.

The group were made aware of a Facebook page that has been established as a local network for support for Governance Professionals/clerks, search for **Clerks to Governors Westmorland and Furness**.

One of our clerks shared a link to PDF formats (created by Ask A Clerk) for the newly published:

- **Maintained Schools Governance Guide**
- **Academy Trust Governance Guide**.

Please note that the governance guides will be updated at some stage, so please check you are using the latest version, which are available on the DfE website (**Maintained Schools Governance Guide, Academy Trust Governance Guide**).

School to school support

Further to previous 'School to School Support' articles, the GST wish to remind any governors/trustees who feel they may be in a position to provide governance support to other boards on a voluntary basis, to contact the GST for an informal conversation.

We would like to extend this invite to include clerks (governance professionals).

Please contact Jane Lees, Governor Support Assistant or drop an email to GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk to discuss further or if you would just like a little bit more detail.

GST Contact Details

The GST continues to offer advice, support, and guidance, specific to your boards needs and can be contacted as follows:

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