

Dear Chair of Governors

Whole school communities are doing a wonderful and fundamental job in supporting the national effort against Covid 19. We recognise the immense pressure, uncertainty and anxiety which is felt by school staff and we would like to thank you for the role you are playing in supporting school leaders at this unprecedented and challenging time. As Chair of governors you have a vital role in keeping your board informed, making decisions on their behalf and protecting school leaders, many of whom are already feeling over-burdened.

There will come a time over the coming weeks and months that you may start to think about how best you can continue effective governance of your school or even if you should be doing so at all. The answer to this will depend entirely on your own school situation and a decision you will take as an individual school or as a Trust. Over time, conversations between the Chair, Headteacher and Clerk (if a professional clerking service is used) can decide on a way forward. **For now we advise taking the approach a board would do during a school holiday period.** Remember that DFE advice to schools is to cancel all non-urgent meetings.

In response to requests from governors we offer the following advice at this difficult time:

1. Ensure all governors understand that school staff are working under immense pressure at this anxious time trying to keep everyone safe. **The Chair should be the point of contact for governors with any questions or queries.** Governors emailing head teachers late at night to check on their welfare or unexpectedly turning up at schools to be supportive of school staff are well meaning but can add additional unnecessary challenges. Governors should not be attending school in this capacity.
2. **Make the most of the emergency delegated role of Chair** or Vice-Chair (Governance Handbook para 4.3.39). Chair's Actions can be used to make best use of time in an emergency situation. We advise that any decisions made by the Chair or Vice-Chair should always be reported to governors/trustees as soon possible, we advise not to wait until the next meeting.
3. **Prioritise the urgent.** Postpone all non-urgent business. Restrict governance business to the following:
 - i. **Critical board decisions only** (for example ratifying new HT appointments)
 - ii. National Governance Association advice is that governors should be '*monitoring*' the wellbeing of the school community and the care of children in schools that remain open. Our experience is that the word '*monitoring*' is often misunderstood. Governors need to know how the school, in general terms, is continuing to provide care for identified children, the support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home and arrangements for staff who are remote working. The Chair should provide this information to the board at an appropriate time and gather information in a way which doesn't add an additional burden to school leaders.
4. Some **decisions can be made through governance by e-mail.** Providing there are clear parameters around response times and opportunities for submission of questions, papers can be circulated for board members to make decisions to approve or oppose matters. We advise you to be cautious over this approach as it doesn't allow for the immediacy of discussion and can lead to misinterpretation of the written word.
5. **Consider meeting virtually.** This needs to be considered carefully to ensure all board members have a space and can access software to allow this to happen. Before deciding to go ahead with this approach please remember that head teachers are also governors and that their attendance at such a meeting should not provide an additional burden at this time. Keep virtual meetings to a minimum length dealing with only those matters which are critical. For those who wish to have a protocol, I



am grateful to Steve Barker from Surrey who has given us permission to pass on the attached document for virtual meetings if it can be of support to others.

6. **Make a contingency plan.** In the current circumstances with an increased risk of illness. We advise that a succession plan is put in place for chairing the board.

Matters relating to ongoing panels

Some schools may be half way through a process of panel hearings, for example for exclusions or complaints. We advise that these are placed on hold.

Headteacher recruitment

This will be an especially difficult time for schools who have started or are about to start a recruitment process in time for September. This situation needs to be risk assessed, with the support of board members, and consideration should be given to the possibility of interim arrangements. Don't forget to include your diocesan and local authority advisers in such discussions. We do not advise recruiting through any virtual means.

Academy Trust Boards

The provisions for Chairs of Local Governing Boards to act in emergency situations and what these delegated functions might be should be contained within the scheme of delegation. If there is no such provision then a decision can still be made by the Trustees to temporarily allow delegated functions, within agreed parameters, by a resolution of the Trust board.

Finally...

Adhere to government guidelines and basic principles where the guidelines are insufficiently detailed.

The Education Team continues to work remotely for the foreseeable future. Advisers have been asked to limit their direct contact with schools to that which is absolutely necessary, as we understand multiple contacts even though very well intentioned may not be helpful at the moment. However, should you have any questions or require our support please contact the named adviser for the school.

We would like to thank you again for all you are doing as a volunteer in supporting the children and their families at this time. Please find attached a reflection which you may also find helpful.

Kindest regards

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