



Governance Update April 2020

This is an unprecedented and extremely difficult situation. As a governor/LGB member you will want to support your school the best way you can while at the same time dealing with your own personal circumstances.

The [DfE advice to governing boards](#) is to prioritise supporting school leaders and staff where needed to allow them to get on with operational matters, this is particularly important if your school is being used as one of the Local Authority hubs.

Governing Body Meetings

With the summer term officially restarted meetings will be programmed in and GB's are looking for guidance on how to provide continuity. The roles, duties and three core functions of school governance have not changed as a result of school closures, but it is appropriate for all non-urgent business to be delayed and meetings restricted to:

- Business critical decisions (e.g. budget approval, ratifying school leadership appointments etc.)
- Monitoring how the school is continuing to provide care for children who are vulnerable, children with ECHP plans the children of key workers, associated risks, issues etc.
- Safeguarding - Monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders
- Any issues arising from how the building is currently being used and remote working for staff
- Support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home

Maintained school governance procedures regulations give governing boards the power to approve alternative arrangements for governors to participate or vote at meetings of the governing board including, but not limited to by telephone or video conference. See [here](#) for sample policy.

We would advise governing boards to put in place arrangements to meet remotely, consider levels of delegation so that fewer governors can make

decisions and decide an approach to chair's action especially when pupil and staff safety is paramount and ever changing information is being received.

There are a number of alternatives to face to face meeting:

- governors/trustees dialling in to a telephone conference call;
- governors/trustees signing in to an online video conference using a platform like Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams;
- governors/trustees using a unified communication and collaboration platform like Microsoft Teams to hold a simultaneous electronic conversation,
- governors/trustees conducting business and voting by email correspondence.

'We would recommend that governing boards arrange virtual meetings by telephone, video conference or through an online platform, rather than conducting business and voting by email correspondence. The exchange of numerous emails lacks immediacy, restricts the opportunity for the governing board to interact in real time, can result in some governors/trustees losing track of others' contributions, and can make recording problematic for the clerk/governance professional.'

NGA April 2020

There is no requirement for Governing Boards to adopt a substantial policy document for virtual meetings, but a simple set of ground rules agreed by all and documented by the clerk may help them run more smoothly.

For a handy beginners guide to 'Zoom' click [here](#).

What is Chair's Action?

The Chair's action is the chair's ability to make decisions and act on the governing boards behalf when it is not possible to meet and should be used in cases of urgency where a delay would be likely to be seriously detrimental to the interests of the school, a pupil, a parent or member of staff. Where possible any decisions should be made in consultation with the headteacher. This could include updating a vital safeguarding policy but does not extend to approving the annual budget. These powers already exist, and you do not need further approval, but you must report to the GB the actions that were undertaken and ensure the clerk has recorded any decisions.

Safeguarding

It is recommended that as a priority, either the safeguarding governor/trustee, chair or other member of the board as appropriate makes contact with the school leader, DSL or SENCO and receives a regular update on the safeguarding arrangements made in response to COVID-19. Talk about:

- How the school is making sure vulnerable pupils are kept safe (including those who are at home, rather than in school), and whether these plans are working well
- How the school is working with the LA to safeguard vulnerable pupils
- How the school is checking in on all pupils who are staying at home
- How pupils, especially vulnerable pupils, who are still coming in to school are coping
- Whether staff have concerns about any pupils who aren't technically categorised as 'vulnerable' by the DfE, and what the school is doing for these pupils
- How the school is supporting pupils who are eligible for free school meals, and whether pupils are accessing this provision
- If your school is delivering remote lessons, what safeguarding arrangements are in place to keep pupils safe
- Any plans the LA may have to create 'hub' schools, and what impact that might have on safeguarding arrangements
- Any support that staff need from you

The DfE has published [interim safeguarding advice](#) which recommends that schools review and revise their child protection policy to reflect the new arrangements for Covid 19. There is no requirement to rewrite the whole policy and there are many sample addendums/annexes available - Kym Allen, NGA etc. Any changes to the policy can be approved as a Chair's Action and brought to the next GB meeting for full approval.

Maintaining Membership of the Governing Body

If the term of office of an elected governor is due to end during this period, it is recommended that the GB allow those governors to remain in office until it is possible for elections to take place.

It has also been agreed that as a result of Parish Church Council's and the Governing Board/Local Governing Body not being able to complete the process of nominating Foundation Governors, the Carlisle Diocesan Board of Education has agreed that Foundation Governors/LGB Foundation Members who reach the end of their term during this period will be allowed to remain in office until it is possible for the usual nomination and appointment process to resume.

Headteacher Appointments

The implications for Governing Boards undertaking headship recruitment will vary from school to school. Diocesan advice would be to postpone recruitment for headteachers who will have a teaching element as part of their role. GB's should therefore consider alternative arrangements for the autumn term, including making an interim appointment or continuing with acting headship arrangements, where possible.

Admissions Appeals

Temporary legislation is set to be introduced to ensure parents continue to have 'the right to appeal any schools which has refused their child a place amid the current

situation. Regulatory changes will come into force from April 24 and last until January 31, 2021. For more details [see here](#).

SIAMS/Ofsted Inspections

Ofsted has ceased all routine inspections and paused the publication of inspection reports. Performance tables will not be published for this academic year.

Carlisle Diocese Board of Education took the decision on Monday 16th March that all scheduled inspections for the remainder of the spring term would be adjusted (postponed) until the summer term. This was followed by announcement by the Church of England that all inspections would be suspended until further notice. We expect further guidance for the summer term dependent on the overall school picture and will keep all schools informed. We have already contacted headteachers due their inspection in the 2020/21 academic year and will continue to support schools to prepare for future inspections.

To sum it up

Chairs	Clerks	Other Governors/LGB Members
You are most likely stepping up and supporting your headteacher as much as possible right now.	Stay in touch with your chair and record any actions they take	Unless you hear otherwise, now is the time to step back and let your chair work with your headteacher.
If you are finding it difficult due to your own personal circumstances discuss sharing responsibility with your vice chair/s	Support a request for a virtual meeting, agree only priority agenda items and continue to distribute papers as normal.	Be on hand to provide extra support if called upon to do so.
Discuss what you need to with your headteacher, but remember operational decisions will lie with them	Aim to keep meetings short – no more than 1 hour	
Keep your clerk updated with any actions you make so that they can be recorded	Minute meetings as usual	
<p>Show your headteacher some love</p> <p>A letter of support from the whole board, or other gesture you know they'll appreciate, can go a long way to making your headteacher feel supported and valued.</p>		

For more information please contact <mailto:education@carlisle-diocese.org.uk>