

Guidance for School Governing Boards

School Closures/Phased Return due to COVID-19

The Coronavirus Pandemic has resulted in schools closure for all children other than those who are children of Key Workers. This has transformed the way that schools are making educational provision for their pupils

This Guidance is intended to provide support and advice to Governing Boards and individual governors in fulfilling their strategic role. The guidance provides a range of information that governors need to be aware of during these unprecedented times for schools and sign- posts governors to further and more detailed information in respect of key areas.

The Guidance has been written by two BSP School Improvement Specialists who have extensive experience in school governance, in providing support, training and advice to GBs, and in reviewing the effectiveness of Governing Boards. The SISs are:

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Introduction

The purpose of the governing body is to help the school to provide the best possible education for its pupils. They set the school aims and policies together with the head. The head is responsible for day-to-day management. In this new situation it is especially important for all to understand the different roles and the difference between strategic and operational matters. The three core functions of governance remain the same. Governors have certain statutory responsibilities which they must fulfil. Governors are critical friends of the school, but especially at this time, they need to consider how they are supporting and encouraging the school to find solutions and overcome obstacles. The health and well-being of staff and pupils must be a key concern.

It is important, as governing boards adapt, that they also continue to comply with the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and do not allow their circumstances to create an environment which allows for a lack of care and due diligence. Therefore, this guidance needs to be read in conjunction with the school's policies and processes on GDPR as well as Matthew Lantos's guidance on GDPR.

Statutory compliance

- 1) The data protection policy for the school is likely to include the principles and protocols that, if followed, provide a safe and secure environment for virtual meetings to take place. Where this is not the case, we recommend that governing boards seek the advice of their school's data protection officer (DPO) as to how the policy needs to be amended. NGA's guidance on maintaining [business continuity and holding virtual meetings](#) includes an example protocol that governing boards can use or adapt. The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has also published [data protection and coronavirus guidance](#) to assist those working remotely in adapting to new arrangements whilst ensuring compliance.
- 2) **Safeguarding** - The DfE has published suggestions for [how to safeguard pupils during remote learning](#). Make sure updates to the safeguarding policy are in line with LA practice. [Changes have been made to KCSIE](#) to help schools meet their duties, as Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) may now not be on site and the changes include arrangements for monitoring vulnerable children during partial closure. Governors should be ensuring that schools have back-up arrangements in place to ensure Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs) remain available and/ or their work continues.

Possible contingencies:

- a. arrangements can be made with a DSL team at another school to stand in should your DSL become ill;
- b. safeguarding guidance allows for safeguarding to be delivered by DSLs onsite, online / by telephone or sharing with another setting;
- c. new staff induction material on safeguarding should remain the same and should be delivered remotely by the DSL.

Key things to ensure:

- all schools must either redraft their Child Protection policies to cover this or, as we recommend – approve an addendum to the existing policy;
 - the addendum/new policy should be published on the school website asap;
 - changes to the CP / Safeguarding policy should be approved by the governing board;
 - See if Brent LA have produced a [Model Addendum](#) and here is one from [Browne Jacobsen](#) – make sure you change it according to your unique needs
- 3) Sex and Relationship Education** – this becomes statutory from September 2020. Check the school is on track to achieve compliance by September.
- 4) Contingency plans** - BSP also recommend governing boards have in place contingency plans in case the chair and/or vice chair become unavailable, so that there is clarity about who will be the conduit of information for the board.
- 5)** Guidance about changes to newly qualified teacher (NQT) induction during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-induction-for-newly-qualified-teachers>. We advise governors monitor that NQTS are still receiving a reduced timetable, receiving regular CPD and that arrangements are in place if the NQT mentor becomes ill or incapacitated or if previous reports indicate an NQT might not successfully complete their NQT period.

What are the expectations on Governing Board meetings at the moment?

Links

[The Coronavirus: Information for governing boards March 2020 | National Governance Association' - National Governance Association](#)

<https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/6c08ef2c-1421-4319-bcbb-2ff98ae94142/COVID-GUIDANCE-ON-DECISIONS-AND-MEETINGS-UPDATE-FINAL-07042020.pdf>

<https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/curriculum-and-pupils/pastoral-care/health-and-medical-needs/coronavirus-what-your-board-needs-be-doing-now/?marker=visited-articles&marker=site-tool-visited>

<https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/the-governing-body/meetings/meeting-procedures/governor-meetings-virtual-remote-attendance/?marker=content-body>

If you have planned a normal agenda for your next Governing Board meeting we advise you consider deferring all normal governance matters until a later date, with suggested wording for your meetings being, 'Deferral of usual Summer Term Agenda, approval of minutes and matters arising from the original FGB summer/spring term to later into the academic year.' Then move onto the proposed agenda items below as your agenda, listed 1 to 5. Please remember to ensure you still allow for declaration of interests and any other business as part of your agendas and pay particular attention to point 5: Monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders. We advise that governors offer their headteacher a review of appraisal targets, which is standard practice. But ensure it is clear the purpose of the review is to consider wellbeing and welfare and whether targets need to be amended in light of welfare and well being.

It is therefore appropriate for all non-urgent business to be delayed and governing board meetings to be restricted to the following proposed agenda items:

Business priorities

1. Business critical decisions:

- Submitting the [schools financial value standard](#) to your LA (maintained schools) – if you're worried about doing this in time, check with your LA in case they've changed the deadline. They'll also be able to tell you whether you can use 'chair's action' to approve it if need be
- Approving the budget
- Approving pay recommendations
- Recruiting a headteacher (if relevant)
- Staff restructures (if relevant)

2. Monitoring how the school is continuing to provide care for children who are vulnerable children with EHC Plans and the children of key workers, associated risks should be discussed and the board should support the school to find workable solutions to any potential obstacles. An action to consider is to make sure your SEN Governor has checked what is happening in your school and makes a note to follow this up regularly and especially once lockdown has been lifted.

3. Any issues arising from how the building is currently being used and remote working for staff

4. Support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home

5. Monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders. See **appendix A** for possible resources to support staff.

The headteacher report may include some if not all of the above. We suggest the headteacher report needs to cover the following:

- Attendance: see link for advice: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-attendance-recording-for-educational-settings>
- [Skeleton staff](#)
- [Remote learning](#)
- [Safeguarding](#)
- Vulnerable children. We advise this includes: the poorest, the lowest-achieving academically and the least motivated children? Clarify the arrangements for these pupils. Also, what are the arrangements for those pupils in alternative provision?
- Pupils with special educational needs (SEN)
- Children of critical workers
- Pupils receiving [free school meals](#)
- Finance and premises.
- [Health and safety](#)
- [Recruitment](#)
- [Parental engagement](#)
- Staff wellbeing and continuing professional development (CPD)
- Additional support you need from the governing board

How do we conduct virtual meetings?

Reference:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-governance-update/school-governance-update-march-2020>

<https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/the-governing-body/meetings/meeting-procedures/governor-meetings-virtual-remote-attendance/?marker=content-body>

<https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/6c08ef2c-1421-4319-bcbb-2ff98ae94142/COVID-GUIDANCE-ON-DECISIONS-AND-MEETINGS-UPDATE-FINAL-07042020.pdf>

The Department for Education advises against governing bodies meeting in person, and to instead adopt alternative arrangements, for example by using video or teleconferencing applications. If you are using video conferencing platforms to continue to meet as a governing body, then please consider the security of the platforms that you are using. You should read the privacy terms and conditions and ensure that where possible you enable any security features. If you have any concerns, consult your IT provider or staff for support. Please remember that all parties will need to agree to these arrangements. We advise that meetings are short and make sure your clerk is able to provide sufficient support. Arrange training for them if necessary. Arrangements can be made with a clerk at another school to stand in should your clerk become ill. Alternatively, contact Deepti Ball or Ann Short, via the BSP, who can clerk in an emergency.

Clerks

Stay in regular touch with your clerk and ensure the clerk minutes any actions that governors take. If your board is having any meetings, minute these as usual too. Be especially careful, as always, to record any decisions (e.g. to hold meetings remotely or defer any tasks), and new arrangements (e.g. link governors holding remote conversations with staff). Ask them to check if Terms of References need to be changed, so virtual meetings can take place and decisions can be made at virtual meetings. They should also check the scheme of delegation, so that everyone is clear about accountability for decision making. This is especially important in regards to chair's action. The link below has more guidance on chair's action:

<https://schoolgovernors.thekeysupport.com/the-governing-body/roles-on-the-governing-body/governing-body-chairs/the-chair2019s-power-to-act-in-cases-of-urgency/?marker=content-body>

Changes to school admission appeals due to coronavirus

Governing boards and clerks are encouraged to consult the accompanying [guidance](#) that sets out where the temporary regulations should be followed in preference to normal Appeals Code requirements:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-appeals-code/changes-to-the-school-admission-appeals-code-regulations-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

We advise this guidance is followed and that governing boards clarify if a school representative is needed. This is most likely the case where the governors or trust are the admissions authority, so check who your admissions authority is. If relevant, have in place contingency plans in the case that a school representative becomes unavailable and unable to attend the admissions appeal.

Pupil Premium

Schools are expected to continue to provide meals for benefits-related FSM children who are not at school during term time. If providing through current mechanisms, schools must ensure meals are distributed within social distancing guidelines. If unable to provide through current mechanisms, schools can use a DfE voucher scheme:

- funding for this is additional to existing FSM budgets
 - schools order vouchers and payments met centrally by DfE
 - 'eCodes' or physical gift cards for a range of supermarkets available
- Schools* can accept new FSM children during the crises. We advise you:
- ensure the school is communicating so parents know to apply to ensure they get appropriate support (especially important in the light of recent job losses)
 - ensure the details of this are on your website.

If parents approach you

Now, perhaps more than ever, it's important to avoid mixed messages. Should parents approach you directly with questions or complaints about the school, refer them:

- Directly to the headteacher, or
- To your school's complaints procedures

What else has DfE said

DfE urges schools' [Get Information About Schools](#) (GIAS) gatekeepers and individuals who have their details on GIAS to keep email addresses up to date. Important information being communicated from the department may require quick and effective action. We advise you make sure governors' details are correct and updated.

Critical Incidents during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic means that there is an increased risk of critical incidents both within schools and the wider community. This is coupled with a general increase in levels of anxiety amongst the population owing to the pandemic and associated necessary measures taken by the UK government, including school closures and stringent social distancing rules. Therefore, the heightened need to provide emotional and practical support to schools and settings at this time is important to be recognised. Clarify with the LA any support or guidance they are offering in terms of creating a strategy to respond to a critical incident. We advise you have a strategy in place, which includes risk assessments in terms of bereavements and staff absence.

Where can Governing Boards find updated information to support them

- 1) **BSP will hold a webinar for governors later this term. The topic will be: Effective governance during the COVID -19 pandemic, and this will be followed with a question and answer session. Details will be sent to governors shortly.**
- 2) Schools in Brent are able to contact **Brent Local Authority** for advice and guidance on a range of matters affecting schools during this period.
- 3) ***Please also check out The Key*** - For school governors and senior leaders, this is an up to date information service summarising the most important DfE and governor information and providing policy advice. This is an easily accessible service which in the current situation has its COVID pages accessible to all Governors (currently without payment). Any additional information available on the Key site can be accessed by signing up for a 30 day free trial – (follow their links). Here is a link: [Covid-19 advice for school governors from The Key](#)
- 4) The **National Governance Association (NGA)** has made its GOLD line Advice Service available to all governing boards that have questions about maintaining their business in the current circumstances. You can contact GOLD line by emailing them gold@nga.org.uk or by calling 0121 237 3782. NGA GOLD members are asked to make a request through the usual route. Here is a link: [GOLDline-The NGA Advice service](#)
- 5) **Appendix B also signposts governors to guidance available.**

Appendix A-- Useful online resources and apps to support well being

- [Public Health England](#)
- [Every Mind Matters](#)
- [Carers Bucks](#)
- [Sleepio](#) – free access to a 6 week online sleep improvement programme
- [Action for Happiness](#)
- [Coronavirus and your money](#)
- **My Possible Self and Feeling Good** (age 18+) are mental health apps which supports you to develop skills to manage anxiety and stress and improve your wellbeing. mypossibleself.com
- **Calm Harm** is an app supporting those concerned about self-harm with managing emotions. [Calm Harm](#)
- Relax your body and mind with this series of **NHS audio tracks** designed to help you build confidence, energy and a positive mindset. nhs.uk/apps-library/feeling-good-positive-mindset
- A **mindfulness** course which is available online for improved mental wellbeing (£30). bemindfulonline.com
- **Thrive** – Use games to track your mood and teach yourself methods to take control of stress
- **Calm** – Meditate, sleep, relax
- **Headspace** – Meditation, sleep, healthy mind
- **Aura** – Personalised meditation

Appendix B – National Guidance

National Guidance

- [DfE extension of free school meals eligibility](#) (published April 20th 2020)
- [DfE School governance update](#) (last updated April 15th 2020)
- [Guidance for schools about temporarily closing](#) (last updated April 28th 2020)
- [Performance measures](#) (last updated April 8th 2020)
- [Implementing social distancing at school](#) (last updated April 7th 2020)
- [DfE funding for additional costs](#) (last updated April 7th 2020)
- [Free school meals guidance](#) (last updated April 30th 2020)
- [Changes to Keeping Children Safe in Education](#) (last updated March 27th 2020)
- The Children’s Commissioner for England has issued [a children’s guide to coronavirus](#) (published March 27th 2020)
- [DfE General Guidance for Schools](#) (last updated April 7th 2020)
- [Maintaining educational provision](#) (last updated May 5th 2020)
- [Public Health England](#) (published March 4th 2020)