

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): INFORMATION FOR GOVERNING BOARDS



NGA has made its [GOLDline advice service](#) provided to GOLD governing board members, available to all governing boards that have questions relating to the information sheet.



1 SCHOOL CLOSURES ANNOUNCED

- The government has announced the closure of all state schools to almost all pupils until further notice. The closure will take effect from the afternoon of Friday 20 March. Nurseries, private schools and sixth forms should also follow this guidance.
- The closure will apply to all children, except those of key workers and those who are “most vulnerable”, including those with social workers and education, health and care plans. The cabinet office will be publishing a list of the key worker categories.
- Schools and settings are being encouraged to stay open for this purpose throughout the Easter holidays.
- Where schools and in particular special schools are unable to provide this reduced provision, local authorities will work with the DfE’s regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available.
- Primary school assessments or secondary exams will not go ahead this summer and the government will not be publishing performance tables. The government will work with the sector and Ofqual to ensure children get the qualifications they need.
- As soon as possible the government will give schools the flexibility to provide meals or vouchers to children who are eligible for free school meals, and will launch a national voucher system.



2 IMMEDIATE PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNING BOARDS

This is an unprecedented and extremely difficult situation. It will lead to more questions than there are answers over the coming days and weeks. Those governing will want to support their schools the best way that they can at the same time as dealing with their own personal circumstances. They will also be considerate of the enormous task that staff have in ensuring continuity of education and making the reduced provision work on the ground. The immediate priorities for governing boards are to:

- Establish a regular and manageable channel of communication between the school and governing board. In all probability this will be overseen by the headteacher, chair of the board and clerk working together.
- Identify the urgent business that cannot be delayed during the period that schools are closed and are providing reduced provision. Urgent business will be defined on a case by case basis but in all probability will cover the deployment of resources (e.g. budget approval), how the school is meeting the operating expectations set out by the government and monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils and staff, which is paramount.

- Putting in place arrangements, which ensure that the governing board can continue to function, carry out urgent business and decision making during the period that schools are closed and are providing reduced provision. This will involve boards holding virtual meetings, considering levels of delegation so that fewer governors / trustees can make decisions and deciding their approach to chair's action especially when pupil and staff safety is paramount.
- Chairs, clerks and headteachers will be at the forefront of the discussions about governing boards continuing to function at this time and the logistics of making it work. This is a real example of clerks being expert advisers and directly contributing to the efficient conduct of governing boards.



3 Maintaining the business of the governing board

- To ensure that the urgent business is carried out, NGA advises governing boards to put in place arrangements to hold virtual meetings (for example by telephone conference, Skype, Microsoft Teams etc.), consider their levels of delegation so that fewer governors / trustees can make decisions and decide their approach to chair's action especially when pupil and staff safety is paramount.
- [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 (and committees) including but not limited to by telephone or video conference'. The [model articles of association for academy trusts](#) state that trustees can attend meetings remotely subject to certain stipulations set out in article 126. Academies should nevertheless refer to their own articles for clarity.
- In cases where there is no provision for, or where it is just not possible to approve or implement alternative meeting arrangements, the chair's powers to act etc, NGA advises governing boards to be sensible, pragmatic and responsible about discharging their functions. Where it proves impossible to make a decision or discharge a function operating strictly by the rules, there should at least be a communication and audit trail explaining why the alternative approach was taken. More than anything governing boards should ensure that the COVID-19 issue does not create an environment which allows for a lack of care and diligence.



4 DEALING WITH TIME BOUND PROCESSES SUCH AS COMPLAINTS AND EXCLUSIONS

- It may prove necessary to place time bound processes such as exclusions and complaints on hold until it is reasonably practicable, if it is not possible to complete them by holding virtual meetings. Governing boards and clerks will assess this on a case by case basis, co-ordinating with others (such as parents) who may need to attend such meetings and seeking advice as necessary.



5 Further support from NGA

- As well as the advice that is available via the [NGA GOLDline](#), we are preparing further guidance on managing urgent business and making virtual meetings work. We are also planning to hold a webinar on this topic. Look out for details on www.nga.org.uk