



Outstanding Governance AWARDS



Celebrating the best
of school and trust
governance



Thursday 28 September 2023
2pm to 4:30pm

Terrace Pavilion
House of Commons



Outstanding Governance AWARDS

Governors, trustees, boards, and governance professionals make a substantial contribution to the education of children and young people. These biennial awards celebrate their important role and recognise the very best practice in school and trust governance. Our finalists lead the way as exemplars of good governance and have met rigorous judging criteria to reach the final of the Outstanding Governance Awards 2023.

We will recognise achievements in four award categories:

- Outstanding clerk to a governing board
- Outstanding lead governance professional
- Outstanding governance in a single school
- Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust

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Foreword

The commitment and contribution of those governing our schools and trusts is often overlooked, their hard work usually carried out behind closed doors. NGA's Outstanding Governance Awards offer an opportunity every two years to celebrate the very best in school and trust governance practice and share it far and wide. The awards contribute to our Visible Governance campaign, which champions the role and impact of good governance on schools and the education their pupils receive.

We know that governors and trustees quietly get on with their role to benefit children and young people, not to put themselves in the limelight. Of course, this will always be the priority, but making the role more prominent is crucial to volunteer recruitment, more effective engagement with stakeholders, and a better understanding of the benefits of good governance.

Our finalists each show commendable examples of improvement and achievement; of facing and overcoming challenges; and innovating and engaging to create positive outcomes. Stories of excellence are vital to avoid the sector just talking about governance when things go wrong; they help underline that governance truly contributes to the success and sustainability of our schools, the development and wellbeing of staff, and the educational achievement and wellbeing of children and young people.

We encourage all our finalists to share their achievements far and wide, be proud of everything they do, and NGA will continue to use our voice to do the same.

Emma Knights and Emma Balchin, Co-chief Executives, NGA

The achievements of our 2023 finalists are set against a backdrop of such an exceptional and difficult time for our schools and wider communities. Since the pandemic, governors, trustees and governance professionals have continued to work tirelessly alongside leaders to support their staff, pupils and families. We come together to celebrate that extraordinary dedication and commitment not just of our winners but the quarter of a million volunteers in the state school sector.

Our four categories showcase the changing landscape of schools and their governance. They recognise excellence in governance in the range of state school types, acknowledging the different challenges and opportunities each can face as well as how boards create and deliver inspiring visions. We have two awards for governance professionals to highlight both the best in clerking single schools and in leading governance provision across multiple schools.

What unites all our finalists is their passion for achieving the best for the children and young people they serve. Each board, clerk and lead governance professional has shown an outstanding quality in their practice, and a belief and total commitment in what good, strong governance can achieve for their schools now and in the future. Thank you for doing what you do.

Lynn Howard, Chair of Trustees, NGA

Outstanding clerk to a governing board

This award celebrates the integral role of the professional clerk. Our finalists each demonstrate outstanding practice in providing administrative support and legal and procedural advice and go above and beyond to significantly impact the effectiveness of their governing board. Judges commended the enthusiasm these individuals showed for their schools, their commitment to children and young people, and their dedication for improving governance. NGA was encouraged to see the quality of nominations that were made by boards from all over the country, all of which demonstrated just how fundamental quality clerking is to the role of the governor and trustee.

Thank you to our category judges Fiona Collier, Co-chair, NCOGS and Steve Edmonds, former Director of Advice and Guidance, NGA.

Winner

Tim Bennett, Kings Heath Primary School

Excellence and consistency are words that sum Tim up as a clerk. Judges heard many examples of where Tim made it his mission to ensure that the board is not only aware of what the requirements are but also how best practice can be most effectively implemented. He has been instrumental in implementing monitoring and reporting routines as well as being the architect of the school's annual governance statement. Judges were struck by his work in governor recruitment – supporting the board through two skills audits and ensuring that the board seeks to recruit governors with the full knowledge of the skills they need. A trusted and reliable adviser, the board stated that he “ensures, to the best of his abilities, that we lead this school in the interests of the children, staff, and the wider community.” His work is outstanding in all aspects.

Highly commended

Diane Moss, Tiffin School

In five years, Diane has been instrumental in transforming the board's approach to strategic oversight. Using her excellent judgement, Diane has supported the board in bringing about changes to their committee structure, the remit of link governors, and adopting a wider strategic focus that embodies the school's belief that education is about more than just academic success. Judges were impressed by the valuable insight she gave during a recent headteacher recruitment process, providing valuable insight at every stage and helping the board with an incredibly important responsibility. Diane is a tremendous asset to the governing board and is a credit to her profession.

Outstanding lead governance professional

This award recognises individuals leading and managing clerks, clerking services and governance support in academy trusts, local authorities, and other service providers. Our finalists each show outstanding leadership and have had a demonstrable impact on governance compliance, efficiency, and effectiveness across a number of schools. Judges described the finalists as “excellent role models for governance professionals” who are value driven leaders, who have helped foster a culture of effective and ethical governance in the organisations that they support.

Thank you to our category judges Peter Swabey, Policy and Research Director, The Chartered Governance Institute and Steve Edmonds, former Director of Advice and Guidance, NGA.

Winner

Maria Maltby, David Ross Education Trust

Maria is described by the trust's CEO as having driven a remarkable turnaround in the governance of the trust. She has made a significant and positive impact and is committed to ensuring that decision making is informed and effective – offering advice to all levels of governance and establishing clear and effective governance arrangements. Judges were impressed by the number of examples where Maria has more than fulfilled the criteria set for the award: the success of communication and engagement with trustees, governor forums, development of an exclusion and suspension toolkit, an annual plan for governor training, inductions for new trustees and chairs of academy committees, ensuring that clerks complete the clerks training programme and highlighting the importance of diversity on the board. Her efficiency, effectiveness and commitment to excellent governance left the judges in no doubt that she is an outstanding lead governance professional.

Highly commended

Allan Howells, The Learning Partnership

Allan is highly esteemed for his commitment to effective communication and empowering others through his support and guidance. Colleagues described how he has transformed governance activities and advanced change to improve the effectiveness of governance at all levels. Judges were impressed by how Allan had overcome challenges and been pivotal in building strengths at the local governance level, sharing best practice between boards, and addressing equality, diversity, and inclusion by recruiting governors from different backgrounds. The impact of his work has been greater depth, skills, and knowledge at all levels of governance and significantly increased the uptake of training opportunities.

Finalist

Becky Perkes, Our Lady of the Magnificat Multi Academy Company

In just one year, Becky has effectively embedded a governance infrastructure including a code of conduct, terms of reference, regular governance updates, fortnightly chair meetings and an annual agenda plan. Becky was described by one trustee as having been “instrumental in introducing innovative practices and ideas to the clerking process. It is clear that she has had significant positive impacts within the trust. The judges were struck by Becky's work supporting changes and ensuring that all academy committee members and trustees have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities, as well as presenting a strategic plan for further governance development to the board. As a result of her approach, the trust has seen a significant improvement in the quality of governance, the clerking team is more efficient, and the leadership team has benefitted from better communication and streamlined processes.

Finalist

Mel Greener, Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust

Mel has developed a small team of clerks, including a young person completely new to the role who is thriving under her leadership and management. Judges noted her importance in developing stakeholder engagement within the trust, promoting stakeholder engagement as a critical part of the trust's visions and values and ensuring that stakeholder voices are used, along with external and internal data to assess the impact of the board's strategies. She has been instrumental in instituting a root and branch reform of governance, building an innovative and transformative training and development package for those governing. The trust's CEO credits her as “an utter pleasure to work with and is fundamental to our success as a team.” Mel's enthusiasm for governance is described as infectious.



Outstanding governance in a single school

Our finalists each demonstrate how the eight elements of effective governance enable them to fulfil their core responsibilities and go beyond the basics of their role to impact the education provided to pupils in their schools significantly. Facing a range of challenges and circumstances, they all display outstanding strategic leadership, effective support and challenge to executive leaders, and the courage and dedication to make bold decisions in the interests of their pupils.

Thank you to our category judges Lynn Howard, Chair of Trustees, NGA and Emma Balchin, Co-chief Executive, NGA.

Winner

University Technical College, Leeds

This board excels with the strength of its vision “to inspire the next generation of leading engineers, scientists and innovators.” It is clear trustees are fully invested in this aim and that it underpins all aspects of its strategic decision making. Having built a solid and trusting relationship with the trust leader, trustees effectively monitor the implementation of the strategy with a constant focus on achieving the best outcomes for pupils. The board also demonstrates a strong commitment to cultivating a culture of inclusion and diversity, particularly promoting women in STEM and social mobility for disadvantaged pupils. The judges were impressed with the trustees’ passion to positively impact pupils’ lives and the effective and enthusiastic way they approach governance. This is a clearly passionate board that strives to promote high standards and ensure each child has the best experience in their school.

Highly commended

David Nieper Academy

The board’s strong vision and practices have played a vital role in a period of significant improvement, achieving its best Ofsted result in 20 years. It has evolved into a highly desirable school with good quality teaching and greatly improved student outcomes. Judges were particularly impressed by the board’s efforts to develop a positive culture for staff and students, set through relevant policies and procedures. Self-evaluation has resulted in the board changing its structure and practices to further effective governance. Trustees have an excellent understanding of the school and its needs, achieved through quality data, monitoring visits, stakeholder engagement and the use of external expertise. This has enabled them to make well-informed decisions and monitor their effects. The board understands and works to ensure it reflects the community it serves and demonstrates a passion for raising the aspirations of pupils, equipping them with the education and skills needed to reach their potential.

Finalist

Saint Ambrose College

A diverse and efficient board guided by core values: this board has undergone a significant transformation. Having identified areas of development through effective self-evaluation, the board has undergone substantial changes, including introducing professional clerking, recruiting to strengthen the skills of the board, and establishing effective chairing. The board has played an instrumental role in improving the school’s finances – through the board’s strategic resource management and focus on financial leadership; the school has gone from having an in-year deficit to securing future financial stability. The judges were also impressed by the board’s work on staff and pupil wellbeing, having established a specific committee to monitor this area. The board also demonstrates a keen commitment to stakeholder engagement, which furthers the board’s openness with the community and informs its decision making. The board acts with clear direction, a testament to the school’s strong mission and ethos, ultimately ensuring that providing the best outcomes for pupils is at the fore.

Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust

This award recognises outstanding governance across a multi academy trust. Finalists evidenced how their governance practice has evolved, demonstrated a robust strategic approach, and promoted a healthy culture and positive change. They demonstrate the stories of success where central and local governance work together as one organisation to best serve their schools and communities.

Thank you to our category judges Sam Henson, Director of Policy and Information, NGA and Clare Collins, former Head of Consultancy, NGA.

Winner

Ambitions Academies

Ambitions’ story epitomises how governance in a growing organisation needs to evolve and change. Judges were impressed with how the trust’s governance has evolved and matured over time as the trust has gradually taken on a range of school types. In addition to the central board, the value placed on local governance is evident – local chairs are proud of their schools and feel empowered to act as champions and advocates of their institution. The board ensures excellent support and clarity about the local tier’s role without limiting its ability to engage and raise concerns. The trust’s chair and vice-chair are assets to the organisation who have applied their professional experience to add significant value to the board. The trust’s vision of “outstanding achievement for all” is being revised; this was evidently a board-led process with ample involvement of key stakeholders, demonstrating an impressive commitment and buy-in to the trust’s vision and values throughout the board’s conversations with judges. It is clear that Ambitions remains a dynamic organisation, delivering on its commitment to ensure every pupil reaches their potential through outstanding MAT governance.

Highly commended

Northern Star Academies Trust

A highly regarded trust with a local and national reputation for its work on environmental sustainability, in 2020, the trust made environmental sustainability a key pillar of its strategy. Judges were particularly impressed with the introduction of the “next generation board” involving children holding trustees to account, and the “green futures board” involving headteachers coming together to act and reflect at school level. Judges noted the board’s commitment to meaningful local governance, focusing on the value of community knowledge and the ability of the local tier to feed this through to the trust board. The trust’s chair and CEO demonstrate an excellent relationship, retaining professional distance and resolving disagreements frankly and transparently. Judges were struck by the praise the trust’s Director of governance and compliance received, having recently appointed two further governance officers, communication across the trust should be commended, with consistent clerking, advice, and training and development featuring as standouts. It is also clear to see the role they play in compliance, completing half-termly dashboards and updating the trust’s websites.

Finalist

Embark Federation

The trust has grown rapidly in the five years since its inception, with its vision and values at the heart of all decision making. Both trust leaders and those governing have been actively involved in their development and seek assurances that all staff embody these values. The cultural narrative is fundamental to everything the trust does. Judges were particularly impressed with the partnership between the CEO and the chair. Both individuals bring a wealth of knowledge to the trust; conversations demonstrated their acute awareness of the balance required for an effective relationship grounded in regular dialogue and professional distance, making it clear that both individuals are mindful of maintaining a relationship that prioritises openness and honesty, which enables both effective support and challenge. The trust’s local governance tier is equipped with a comprehensive scheme of delegation but, crucially, has the freedom to govern with some flexibility to their school-specific contexts. The board actively consults with and listens to the local tier, particularly during periods of growth.

Finalist

Invictus Education

Following an external review of governance, the trust has established a successful new governance structure that has been a resounding success. Judges were impressed with the trust’s lead governance professional, who, as a keen advocate for trust improvement, was influential in instigating the review. Acting as a central point of contact, it was clear that governors and trustees valued their expertise and approachability. Judges also noted the trust’s approach to local governance, which has clearly improved over time with the trust providing support via training, template documents and governance forums. Local chairs commended the trust’s transparent scheme of delegation and the consistency in agendas and timings that made chairing locally a manageable role. It is also clear that the trust is driven by a strong sense of unity between the central and local tiers of governance; strong feelings of connection to the MAT were noted, with chairs forums and advisory hubs a key driver for this.



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SCHOOLS WEEK



Outstanding Governance AWARDS 2023



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