

Welcome to the Summer Term

Welcome to the Cheshire West Governance Association newsletter for the summer term. We hope you are all well and find the information contained useful and informative. If you have any feedback, please let us know by emailing cwgovernance-assoc@gmail.com

Governing and Clerking in Difficult Times by Debbie Tomkinson

The corona virus has impacted everyone's life, not just in the UK but across the globe. Schools are front and centre in the response to the pandemic, providing critical childcare for key workers and vulnerable children and young people. What does this mean for those of us who govern our schools and the clerks that serve the board?

Just as we are all getting used to changing our thinking about how we shop, how we socialise and how seemingly small actions can have a massive impact on our wider communities, for governors and clerks it is an opportunity to think about how we can 'do' governance differently. It is important that governance does not stop in these uncertain times but it should be recognised that, in the immediate future, it should look very different. The government has issued very clear guidance on social-distancing and in their School Governance Update in March the advice was that governing boards should not be meeting in person but should rather look for alternative methods such as via telephone or video-conferencing.

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

The Department of Education have also said that the Board can agree to use these methods without the need to meet first. The Chair or Clerk/Governance professional can contact governors directly to agree alternative arrangements during the lockdown period.

The next consideration is what should an agenda look like during this time. I would anticipate that agendas over the next few months will be considerably shorter. Guidance from the DfE has stated that they should be focused on urgent or time-bound decisions that need to be made. The NGA have suggested that the priorities for governing boards should be:

1. Business critical decisions (e.g. budget approv-

al, ratifying school leadership appointments etc.)

2. 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.

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

<https://www.nga.org.uk/getmedia/08682f90-7df0-4af3-9de4-f7712bf0d129/Covid-19-Guidance-on-decisions-and-meetings-March-2020.pdf>

Whilst we are all professionally and personally in a period of great change and uncertainty, it is important to remember that this situation will end and we will have a new perspective on the role and purpose of governance and how meetings should look.

Thank you to all governors, trustees and clerks/governance professionals for continuing to support your schools.

New Ways of Working by Zoe Lochlin and Julie Nichols

Hopefully, you are aware of the Cheshire West and Chester Council initiative regarding “New Ways of Working”. This is a programme which focuses on researching and understanding excellence in practice and developing a common and consistent approach to working with families.

It has a strong preventative approach at all levels across the continuum of need and is based on shared language and a shared understanding across all partners including schools. Whatever their demographic, many of the families schools deal with, have experienced a broad range of difficulties that may need support and interventions, this initiative seeks to work with them in a new, integrated and targeted way.

As governors, you are responsible for ensuring your behaviour policy reflects the ethos of your school and for holding school leaders to account for its impact and implementation. Here we speak to one of our executive committee members who works at one of the schools that has fully adopted the initiative about her experiences.

Q: What has been your involvement with New Ways of Working?

A: I have recently had the lucky opportunity to take on a role working in a school which has adopted the New Ways of Working and Trauma Informed approach. This is an approach I had not previously been aware of or used, but now I live and breathe it, not only in my professional capacity but also in my own personal home life. As a parent of a child with additional needs some days are more challenging than others, which is the same in the classroom, but by talking to each other and problem solving together we can work through these difficulties.

Q: What does this look like in a school environment?

A: The main focus in our setting is to ensure that we have a consistent approach, so when we are having these difficult conversations with the children, we all have a calm demeanour, never use raised voices and use the same language. This approach has been achieved by all staff being trained and made aware of the wider impact that trauma can have on an individual and considering how to prevent the re-traumatisation to support and assist healing. Staff are trained to recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma and every child in the school is encouraged with restorative conversations to succeed. We will always look at how we can support the children to think about why they are feeling or acting the way they are, or by asking questions about what has happened that day to make them feel the way

they do. This approach allows children to know that the school setting is always going to be a calm environment where regardless of what they have done a member of staff will empower them to recognise their feelings and consider how these can be managed in a more effective manner.

As a school we are actively ensuring that not only the child’s voice but also the family’s voice is heard and listened to. We are always considering and looking for ways we can best work with a family and make a difference. Many parents will have previously had a bad experience of education, so we look at ways we can engage with them and make them feel welcomed, valued and empowered too. This is achieved by all staff always being approachable and non— judgemental and by offering several different workshops throughout the year for the parents to attend to develop their own skills, confidence and wellbeing.

Q: What impact has this had?

A: I strongly believe that through working collectively and recognising that some children and their family members may have had experienced some form of trauma, we will be enabled to see that it is important to empower young people to actively heal and allow them the best start in life. In the time we have been using the approach, we have seen in improvements not only in children’s behaviour but also in parental engagement, which will hopefully have a positive long-term impact on children’s learning.

OFSTED and Governance by Chris Koral

Governors and School leaders representing schools from across Cheshire West and Chester (CWAC) attended the Association's New Ofsted Framework networking event on 27 February at Weaverham High School. Hosted by Weaverham headteacher Clare Morgan, the event was opened by CWGA Chair Janet Myers with a quick quiz aimed at stimulating discussion and testing delegates' knowledge of the new framework.

Janet was followed by Christine Ridley-Thomas, Senior Manager, School Intervention Coordination and SCC, CWAC, who highlighted key aspects of the new Framework and provided an insight into how the framework is being applied in practice, drawing on the experience of inspections carried out under the new framework in Cheshire West schools.

Ofsted Inspector Ian Shackleton joined the meeting and after a short break for refreshments delegates broke into groups, each of which took full advantage of the opportunity to explore the framework in more detail and ask questions of Ian, Christine and two CWGA Executive members whose schools had experienced recent inspections, Andy Canham and Debbie Tomkinson. Much of the discussion concerned the Quality of Education judgements and the "deep dives" that inspectors carry out. Under the new inspection framework, the curriculum is tested in terms of its intent, implementation and impact. There is an expectation that governors should be secure in their knowledge that the aims of the school curriculum are reflective of the aims and ethos of the school and that governors hold leaders to account for the impact it has on learners. This can be evidenced to inspectors through reports and minutes as well as through the meeting that inspectors will have with governance representatives, although evidencing effective challenge does require governors to have a strategic understanding of the aims and the way that impact is measured.

Feedback from delegates was overwhelmingly positive and the event proved particularly timely for Clare Morgan and Weaverham High School Governors Simon Livingstone and Chris Koral – the school was inspected by Ofsted on 10 and 11 March.

Come and Join Us

Are you interested in governance matters within Cheshire West and would you like to be involved in improving networking and training opportunities for governors?

If so, we are currently looking for new members to join us on the executive board. Anyone who is a serving governor or clerk at a CWGA member school is eligible for nomination.

If you are interested, or would like further information, please contact us on cwgovernanceasoc@gmail.com

Upcoming events

Our AGM and next networking event were planned for 25th June at 7pm at Woodlands Primary School in Ellesmere Port. However, it is likely that this will now be done using an online platform. If you would be interested in attending a virtual meeting, please [let us know](#) as this will help us with our planning.

In these challenging times, we are looking at how we can best support your role as governors within the region. Our Heads, Chairs and Clerks Conference was scheduled for 16th October 2020 and we are currently look at ways that we can offer a suitable networking event that maintains social distancing—look out for further details in the next newsletter.

Follow us on Facebook at [CWGA Facebook](#)

Share your views in the annual school governance survey

School governors, trustees and local academy committee members are encouraged to share their experience of school governance and views on topical education policy and events in the annual school governance survey.

Whatever your role on a governing board, however long you've been involved in governance, the National Governance Association welcome the views and experience of all school governance volunteers. The findings will be used to amplify the voice of school governance across the education sector and improve the effectiveness of school governance practice.

Please share it with your wider networks. Depending on the answers you give, the survey will take around 15 minutes to complete. The survey closes on Tuesday 26 May at 5pm.

Complete the survey at <https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/NGAlocal/>

Newsletter Contributors



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As always, if there if you have any suggestions of matters you would like including in future issues, please contact us at cwgovernanceassoc@gmail.com

Twitter: You can keep up to date with our events and news on Twitter [@your_CWGA](#).

