

GUIDANCE:

School funding – how to lobby your MP



Need advice?

For advice on any issue, GOLD members have access to GOLDline legal advice 9–5pm weekdays. Find out more T: 0121 237 3782 www.nga.org.uk/goldline



NGA guide to meeting with your MP

The National Governance Association is holding a week of action on school funding to give governing boards with funding concerns an opportunity to contact their MPs and bring more prominence to the issue across the political arena. The week of action will centre around three events:

- **Thursday 28 February:** visit your MP in Parliament and attend NGA meeting on funding
- **Friday 1 March:** Invite your MP to visit your school
- **Friday 1 or Saturday 2 March:** visit your MP's constituency surgery

Governing boards that would like to send a representative to join NGA's event in Westminster on 28 February, please register your interest with kirstie.ebbs@nga.org.uk

Holding a meeting with your MP can be a great way of getting across your school funding concerns and how this issue is impacting your school community. The purpose of this guidance is to offer governors/trustees some top tips in getting the most out of meeting with their MP.

1. Who is your MP?

- Parliamentary convention means that MPs will usually deal with concerns raised by their own constituents.
- If you are not sure who your MP is, you can find out by visiting the UK Parliament website to find your MP: www.parliament.uk/findyourmp
- This website will also hold your MPs contact and information about any roles they hold.

2. When and where to meet -

28 February - NGA day of action in Parliament

NGA is calling on governors/ trustees from around the country to travel to Parliament on **Thursday 28 February 2019** to attend an event on school funding hosted by NGA and to arrange a meeting with their MP.

- If you wish to meet your MP in Parliament on this day, it is best to make an appointment by contacting your MP's office at least a month in advance.
- If you do not have an appointment, parliamentary staff will attempt to contact your MP, but a meeting cannot be guaranteed.

1 or 2 March - Visit your MP in constituency surgeries

For those who are unable to travel to Westminster, NGA is calling on governors/ trustees to arrange a local meeting with their MP on **Friday 1 or Saturday 2 March 2019**

- Most MPs hold regular meetings with their constituents which are referred to as 'surgeries'.
- These meetings are usually held on Fridays or over the weekend after the MP has returned from Westminster.
- The best way to find out about your own MP's surgery times is to look on their website or to call the constituency office.



Booking your meeting

1. Call or email your MP's office and ask to make an appointment
2. Ask how long your appointment is likely to be so that you can plan ahead
3. You may be asked to give a short summary of the issue that you would like to raise so that your MP can be prepared
4. Let them know if you plan to bring anyone else along to the meeting with you

Before the meeting:

- Do your research and find out what your MP thinks about school funding - you can find this information by reading their biography, researching if they sit on a committee in Parliament (such as the Public Accounts Committee or the Education Select Committee) and what issues they regularly speak about or have voted on in the past; visit the www.theyworkforyou.com website for more information
- Use local intelligence – has your MP visited any local schools? What impression did they make there? Did they listen to concerns? What does local media say about your MP's view on school funding?
- Prepare an agenda and consider how you would like to structure your meeting. It may be helpful to prepare an outline of the key points that you would like to make, in case you need a prompt to get back to the topic of school funding.
- If more than one person is attending the meeting, make sure you agree roles and determine who will be saying what, taking notes, keep time, etc.

Preparing your case:

- Know both sides of the story - do your homework and be prepared to counter any opposition. Those with school funding concerns will be familiar with the government's mantra on school funding: *There is more money going into schools than ever before*. Prepare your counter points: *That is true, but there are more pupils on roll than ever before and there has never been greater expectations and duties on schools. This year, we have experienced increased cost pressures across many areas of expenditure including...*
- If you don't know the answer or how to respond, tell your MP you will get them further information — it's an excellent excuse to follow up and build a relationship with their office.
- Share your story - if this is your first meeting with your MP, you might want to start the meeting by sharing why you choose to volunteer your time and skills to your school and community. You should also explain the role of the governing board and your duty to oversee the school budget and to ensure money is well spent.
- Prepare examples specific to your school - statistics can often seem abstract and impersonal. Sharing a story or case study from your school will put pupils at the heart of the issue. Bring examples of the efficiencies you have already made and the difficult decisions you have taken/ will have to take if the situation does not improve. How has the funding squeeze impacted staffing, the curriculum offer or



maintenance of buildings? Without an increase in funding, how is this likely to impact senior leaders, staff and pupils moving forward?

- Prepare a clear and specific request – this could be to ask your MP to lobby the government, to raise a question in parliament about a specific issue such as high-needs funding or the impact of the reduction of local authority support services or offer your MP a visit to your school.
- It might be useful to leave your MP with a summary of the key points that you raised at your meeting, as well as a reminder of any requests that you have made, so prepare your materials in advance.

Here are some materials you may wish to bring with you/ utilise when preparing for your meeting:

- [NGA's 9 asks for school funding](#)
- *Constituency data on school funding in the [House of Commons Library](#)*
- *Information from the [School Cuts](#) website*
- *An overview of the financial position of your school*
- *Specific examples of decisions you have made to balance the budget*

Once you have agreed your key points, practice speaking. Try to be brief, clear and to the point. Don't be afraid to show your passion about your school, the children and your community!

At the meeting:

- Start by acknowledging your MP and thank them for making time to meet with you – they rarely receive thanks for the work that they do.
- Stick to the issue at hand - your meeting may be short so be ready to summarise the issue and your request in less than 5 minutes so that you can leave the remaining time for questions/ discussion.
- Avoid an argument - not all MPs will be supportive of the view that some governors/ trustees have serious concerns about the sufficiency of school funding. Balanced and thoughtful conversations will keep you MP's office door open even if you don't immediately agree on the issue. Always leave with a thank you and a commitment to follow up with relevant information.
- Make clear requests and ask for a response. Often, the main reason advocates have an unsatisfactory meeting is that their requests were not clear or specific enough.
- Ask your MP what else they think they can do (whether they say yes or no to your original request to support the case for an increase in school funding or lobby the government on this issue).

After the meeting



- Send a letter or email to your MP to thank them for the meeting with you. If you agreed to provide them with any additional information, you can include this in your message.
- Follow up with your MP's office - if they committed to do something, set a reminder and follow this up in a few weeks if you do not receive a response.

National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is an independent charity representing and supporting governors, trustees and clerks in maintained schools and academies in England. The NGA's goal is to improve the wellbeing of children and young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. It does this by providing information, guidance, research, advice and training. It also works closely with, and lobbies, UK government and educational bodies, and is the leading campaigning national membership organisation for school governors and trustees.

The NGA online Guidance Centre is the information hub for governors. It supports you in your role as a governor, giving you access to up to date guidance and advice covering all aspects of school governance, including finance; staffing; Ofsted; curriculum; special educational needs; legislation and school improvement.

Practical governance resources include sample documents; templates; checklists; information summaries; insights; case studies and much more.

To join NGA and receive regular updates, contact:

T: 0121 237 3780 | E: membership@nga.org.uk | www.nga.org.uk

