

# National Governors' Association manifesto

Strong governance ensuring an excellent education for every child



**G**overning boards are responsible for schools and academies. They ensure that children in England are attending effective schools that provide them with a good education and support their wellbeing. Governors and trustees know they have to get it right as the children and young people in their communities only have their school days once.

The National Governors' Association is the representative organisation for school governors from both maintained schools and academies in England, seeking to influence policy at national level, and providing independent information, support and challenge to governing boards and boards of trustees in order to improve standards in state-funded schools.

Over the past decade, and in particular over the past few years, governing boards have been held responsible in a more public way for the standards in schools. They are rightly subject to rigorous scrutiny of their financial monitoring systems. Since the coalition government came into power in 2010, schools have been given greater autonomy, especially

**“Governing bodies perform a critical role in school leadership”**

House of Commons Education Select Committee  
(The role of school governing bodies – June 2013)

## THE NATIONAL GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION CALLS FOR:

1. The issue of school governance to be given greater prominence in central and local government policy making;
2. Induction training to be provided free for all new school governors and trustees;
3. The government to provide financial incentives both to encourage effective collaboration and to schools wishing to join together in LA maintained federations as well as multi-academy trusts;
4. Funding to be distributed in an equitable, objective and transparent manner. Three-year indicative budgets should be introduced for both capital and revenue funding and the level of school funding increased;
5. The supply of high-quality headteachers and teachers to be given more consideration centrally and for the government to take affirmative action to prevent a serious staffing shortage;
6. The promotion of professional governing board clerks;
7. A reduction in the number of new initiatives from central government and a period of relative stability to allow schools to continue to improve.

through the academies programme. Although the government's vision is that schools have greater freedom, it also means that governing boards have more responsibility now than ever. In order to fulfil this challenging role effectively, it is vital that governors know what is expected of them.

### What is governance?

Governing boards of local authority maintained schools and academy trusts of academies/free schools provide accountable bodies for schools and are responsible for the conduct and standards of schools under their governance. They set the strategic direction and are responsible for scrutinising schools' overall performance. Being a governor/trustee is an important and challenging role. Good governance is essential to ensure both that all children reach their full potential and that public funds are spent wisely. Collectively governors are responsible for £46 billion of public expenditure.

### NGA calls for the issue of governance to be given greater prominence in central and local government policy making.

Governors and trustees must be consulted on issues of school effectiveness and on the role and responsibilities of governing boards and their schools. Policy makers must consider the issue of governance when determining policies as it is vital to the success of the education system.

Governors and trustees volunteer to take on this demanding and challenging role and the government must recognise this fact before increasing their workload without real evidence that it will improve schools. They give gladly of their time in order to improve the lives of children and young people; this needs to be the test for any changes. However, governors and trustees must recognise the serious nature of their role and understand what is expected

of them. They must be prepared to undertake training to ensure that they can provide effective challenge, support and strategic direction to their school.

### **Support for governors and trustees improves schools for children**

We welcome the additional funding provided for training for chairs of governing boards, governors and clerks, and the associated scholarships. Governance is a challenging role and those undertaking it need to be properly prepared in order to undertake it well. Repeated NGA surveys show that the vast majority of governors and trustees think that induction training should be mandatory. Induction training is just a starting point and all governing boards should be clear that their members are expected to have regard to their professional development throughout their terms of office.

### **NGA calls for induction training to be provided free for all new school governors and trustees.**

Induction training should be mandatory, but this does not necessarily mean all new recruits have to attend the same course, irrespective of their previous experience, for example as members of boards in other sectors.

Governing boards should already be expecting new recruits to undertake training, and this of course includes headteachers and staff governors. We welcome the expectation placed on governors and trustees to have regard for their ongoing development, and governing boards should consider removing governors who do not.

### **Accountability: measuring effectiveness**

The NGA supports an independent inspection regime. We welcome the greater focus on the role of the governing board in the 2012 Ofsted framework, and greater HMI role in working with schools requiring improvement. Although governance is no longer given its own numerical



grade, the 2012/13 Ofsted annual report highlights good governance as a key element in achieving a 'good' or 'outstanding' grade for leadership and management. NGA works to help raise the level of governance and prevent any school from being inadequate.

High-quality performance data is essential for governing boards to carry out their accountability role. Governing boards cannot challenge and support their leadership teams effectively if they do not have the information and data to do so. The NGA has worked in partnership with Fischer Family Trust to develop the Governor Data Dashboard. However, more priority needs to be given to ensuring governing boards have appropriate and timely information on current pupils and other aspects of school performance, in a way which does not cause bureaucracy for school leaders.

## **“ Collaboration should be encouraged ”**

### **Accountability & transparency: reporting to stakeholders**

The governing board is responsible for holding the leadership of the school to account, but in turn is accountable to the pupils, parents, staff and local community for how well it carries out its strategic functions and oversight.

NGA thinks that all governing boards should report annually to the wider school community and

the wider public. Such reports should include academic achievements but should also reflect the complexity and variety of the challenges faced by schools and the breadth of their successes. The reports should be an honest assessment of the things that have gone well and not so well during the year and the plans for the future.

### **Accountability and participation: working together to improve schools**

NGA welcomes an increased emphasis on pupil and parent involvement, and the move to greater co-operation between schools. Collaboration should be encouraged, as it is an extremely important mechanism for improving both educational standards at individual schools and the wellbeing of children and young people in the community.

Partnerships take time and effort to put in place and NGA calls on the government to not only actively promote school-to-school support, but also ensure it is facilitated for those schools not already participating. There are a number of collaborative options available to schools and they should be free to decide what is right for them.

The NGA is concerned that the distinction between schools working in partnership and schools joined together in formal governance structures is not widely understood. In the latter case, the current government promotes multi-academy trusts as the best structural option for driving school improvement. ➡

However, LA maintained federations can be as effective and should be promoted as a viable alternative option. Financial incentives should be available for schools wishing to form LA maintained federations, in particular primary schools.

**The NGA calls for the government to provide financial incentives both to encourage effective collaboration and to primary schools wishing to join together in LA maintained federations as well as multi-academy trusts.**

## **School autonomy and local authorities**

NGA welcomes the considerable freedom schools now operate within. There remains an important strategic role for local authorities, in particular in ensuring that sufficient school places are available. The provision of good quality school places needs to be centrally co-ordinated and resources should be directed towards setting up new schools only in areas of need.

## **Resources**

NGA acknowledges that school budgets have been protected in relative terms over recent years, but in reality that means budgets have reduced and when local authority services are also being reduced or withdrawn it is becoming increasingly difficult for schools to meet the educational needs of all their pupils.

**NGA calls for the level of school funding to be increased in order to ensure continued improvement of educational standards; such funding must be distributed in an equitable, objective and transparent manner to ensure the needs of different schools are acknowledged.**

Schools need flexibility and freedom to spend their money, subject to rigorous scrutiny. Sufficient capital funding must be made available for the upkeep of school premises. NGA also supports the continuation of targeted funding, in the form of the pupil premium or otherwise, to help improve the achievement of

disadvantaged pupils. In order to effectively plan the budget governing boards need to know how much funding they will receive, ideally for multiple years.

**NGA calls for three-year indicative budgets to be introduced for both capital and revenue funding.**

School leadership teams should include a school business manager, who can work with the governing board to ensure that business and financial management is sound. Governing boards and senior leadership teams must undertake regular and thorough reviews of schools' resourcing needs (including staffing) to ensure that they are using resources to best effect. Governing boards need to ensure that they have sufficient skills and training to interrogate financial matters robustly.

## **Working with headteachers**

NGA respects the professionalism of headteachers, but the governing board has to challenge as well as support. In particular the governing board appoints the headteacher and then manages her/his performance. NGA is working with headteachers to ensure that working relationships in schools are healthy and trusting but not cosy. NGA has agreed a protocol with the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) on 'What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies'.

The NGA is concerned about the shortage of quality applicants for headteacher posts and the potential impact this will have on educational standards. Equally, we are concerned about teacher supply, particularly in shortage subjects.

**The NGA calls for the supply of high-quality headteachers and teachers to be given more consideration centrally and for the government to take affirmative action to prevent a serious staffing shortage.**

## **Curriculum**

Ensuring effective teaching and learning is clearly the province of the headteacher, but the governing board has a role in setting the direction of the curriculum and ensuring the aspirations and needs of all children and young people are being met. The curriculum must be flexible enough to provide the knowledge and skills learners need for the future while encouraging innovative teaching and a joy of learning. It should take into account the needs of different pupils, in particular by providing high-quality vocational options for those pupils for whom the academic route is not appropriate.

## **Clerking**

It is widely recognised that an effective clerk is an invaluable resource for a governing board.

**NGA calls for the promotion of professional governing board clerks.**

The NGA and SOLACE Clerking Matters campaign aims to raise the importance and professionalism of governing board clerks. Consideration should be given to the job title being modernised to ensure the role is given proper recognition. Clerks should have their performance regularly appraised and there should be guidance or benchmarks for remuneration to reflect the professional nature of the role. NGA welcomes the National College for Teaching and Learning's forthcoming training programme for clerks but calls on the government to provide more guidance to clerks on changes in the legislation.

## **Continuing to improve**

There has been much change for schools over the past decade and too many untested initiatives.

**NGA calls for a reduction in the number of new initiatives from central government and a period of relative stability to allow schools to continue to improve.** 