

NGA's manifesto reflects our key views and policy priorities as derived from the voices and experiences of our members and our expertise.

1 More prominence for governance

Good governance is essential to ensure children reach their full potential and public funds are spent wisely. Policy makers must consider schools' governance as vital to the success of the education system – the school governance community needs to be listened to more by the powers that be.

The majority govern to 'make a difference' to children's lives, an enormous group of people vital to society, wanting to give something back. Yet governing workload is increasing; more boards are reporting that the time it takes to govern is growing. Governors/trustees volunteer to take on this demanding and challenging role and the government must recognise this.

NGA calls for the issue of school governance to be given greater prominence in central and local government policy making, recognising the immeasurable contribution of governing boards.

2 Funding

Years of real-terms cuts have placed many school budgets on a cliff edge and governing boards in the most difficult situations. Recent funding announcements are cautiously welcomed, but everyone in the schools sector must work together to make sure this money gets to where it is needed and is used well. Schools will see no extra cash until next year and the announcements coincide with a promise to increase starting salaries for teachers, without a separate funding pot to accommodate this.

All revenue funding should be objectively, transparently and equitably distributed. The national funding formula should be implemented in full as soon as possible.

NGA calls on the government to urgently address the insufficiency and delay to school funding, tackling the shortfall in what has been announced against what is required to reverse the damage done by years of insufficient funding.

3 SEND

NGA is increasingly concerned about the funding levels and arrangements for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The lack of consistency in top-up funding for these pupils must be addressed; schools and staff need further support, including access to relevant high-quality training that caters for the increasingly complex needs that many schools are facing. NGA welcomes any work towards building a more coherent and sustainable system for providing support but this system must be adequately resourced.

NGA calls on the government to increase the level of both funding and wider SEND support for schools, recognising that providing the best possible support for pupils with SEND requires more than just money.

4 Disadvantaged pupils

Governing boards play a major role in championing the needs of disadvantaged pupils. Targeted funding, in the form of the pupil premium or otherwise, must continue in order to overcome barriers to learning facing disadvantaged pupils. This must not be used to supplement the core budget.

However, good teaching alone cannot solve the effects of poverty. Other local public services, including children's services, have suffered gravely from inadequate funding; schools are finding themselves under pressure trying to fill those gaps when families need specialist support from other expert professionals.

NGA welcomes the focus from all political parties on improving the educational outcomes of disadvantaged pupils, but calls on the government to recognise that while education can be an important route out of poverty, other adequately funded public services are required to support disadvantaged children and their families.

5 Staff recruitment, wellbeing and workload

Staff workload and wellbeing pressures are cited as the main reason for teaching staff leaving the profession due to the impact on their quality of life. While the issue has gained greater prominence, there remains significant work to be done. As the employer of staff in the majority of schools, governing boards have an important part to play.

NGA supports the work that is being done to consider the workload and wellbeing of teachers, executive leaders and other school staff by the Department for Education, but the government must take affirmative action to alleviate workload and increase the attractiveness and sustainability of the role. This will require funded provision.

6 School structures

The move to groups of schools should not come at the cost of removing local connectedness and engagement. Local governance, if given adequate levels of influence, can help achieve this.

The potential benefits of forming groups – maintained federations and multi academy trusts (MATs) – are more likely to be achieved within reasonable geographical proximity. As public services, these groups should have a sense of place and put community at the heart of their vision and values.

NGA calls on the government to recognise and respect that many schools have chosen to remain local authority maintained, given the lack of conclusive evidence that any one structure is better than another in bringing about improvement. Schools must receive equal levels of support, regardless of structure.

7 Incentivising collaboration

NGA urges an increased emphasis on greater collaboration between trusts and schools, regardless of structure. Collaboration should be encouraged as a mechanism for improving both educational standards at individual schools, and the wellbeing of children and young people across communities.

NGA calls on the government to consider more urgently how the accountability system is impacting the schools system as a whole, specifically the incentives for forming stronger and greater collaborative models, which include academies and maintained schools, across the sector

8 Engaging stakeholders

A school's stakeholders include pupils, parents, staff, the local community and employers.

All governing boards should be accountable to parents, the wider school community and the wider public.

NGA calls on the government to recognise that ensuring stakeholders' voices are heard is the fourth core function of governance, and structures and culture must ensure this happens in a meaningful way.

9 Governance support

Governance is challenging; all involved in school governance, including school leaders, need to be properly prepared. Induction training is just a starting point; those governing and leading need the appropriate level of professional development opportunities to fulfil their role. The workload needs to be reasonable.

NGA calls on the government to introduce mandatory induction and invest further in the ongoing development and support for all governors and trustees, and increase the governance knowledge of teaching staff and executive leaders.

10 Clerking

Governing boards should seek to recruit high-quality professional clerks and pay them appropriately – it is a role that must be recognised for the worth it adds to the work of the board. All clerks must be performance managed, receive an annual appraisal with the chair and be provided with professional development.

NGA calls on the government to promote professional clerking as an essential part of delivering effective school governance.

11 Diversity

Governors/trustees from ethnic minorities account for just 5% of the country's largest volunteer force, while 10% of governors/trustees are aged under 40. This compares with around a third of school pupils being from an ethnic minority. Adding new governors/trustees to the governing board who are reflective of (but not representatives of) the community the school serves can help it make better decisions in the interest of all pupils. Diversity strengthens governance.

NGA calls on the government to further assist initiatives to increase diversity across the schools system, including our campaign #EveryoneOnBoard to increase diversity of governing boards.

12 Stability and support

Schools have had to react to various periods of transformation over the past decade, with major changes to how they are measured, judged and held to account.

Changes to the Ofsted school inspection framework, to shift the focus from data and outcomes to curriculum and the substance of education, have been largely welcomed, but the needs of governing boards in overseeing school improvement must not be overlooked. Schools need to be given space to develop a broad, inclusive curriculum, with a focus on the issues that make the most difference to pupils' education.

NGA calls for a 'policy relief period', providing schools with space to review the impact of central policy and local practice. This must include a reduction in the number of new initiatives from central government resulting in a period of stability to allow schools to continue to improve. High-quality, affordable support must be available to schools that need it.

www.nga.org.uk/manifesto2019

INDEPENDENT APPROACH

The voices of those governing schools deliver a unique view of society. NGA is not aligned to any political party; we work closely with, and lobby, government and the major educational bodies to ensure that the views of governors and trustees are represented in the national arena.