

**Pupils,
communities
and
accountability**

**School
Governance
2020**

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September 2020

**Visible
Governance**
in schools

Foreword

A governing board volunteers to act as custodian of schools and trusts in the interests of pupils, contributing to the community. This report underlines that purpose of governance: to ensure the best possible education so that our young people are able to flourish and take their place in both the community, both local and global. Schools are however sadly finding themselves needing to mitigate the disadvantages in their communities, increasingly providing basic provisions and services.

Governance is coming of age with just over half of the organisations setting their vision and strategy in a truly collaborative process between the board, school leaders and stakeholders. We still have further to improve as 10% were not involved at all, despite this being the board's first core function, but this is now at a tipping point. Furthermore the vision and strategy is reported to influence the curriculum offer more than anything else, including Ofsted, performance measures or funding. This is quite an achievement, and could be the dawning of more intelligent accountability, with key decisions taken at board and trust level, rather than on high, and after listening to stakeholders.

Engagement with stakeholders is improving, although there is still further to go. Stakeholder engagement and stakeholder involvement in school life has never been of more importance given its impact on education disadvantage and social mobility, affecting not only pupils but school communities as a whole.

Governors and trustees do not believe that the role of the governing board is well understood by many in society. NGA intends to play our part with the Visible Governance campaign to spread the knowledge of governance, not only to value the committed volunteers but also to encourage others to come forward.

Emma Knights, chief executive
National Governance Association

Introduction

Schools are at the heart of their communities, as has been emphasised by the COVID-19 pandemic. Every governing board, no matter the type, educational phase or size of the organisation must ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. As part of this, governing boards champion the needs of all pupils, working closely with senior leaders to develop a strategy, that serves the best interests of all the children and young people within the school or trust. Alongside ambitious vision setting, governing boards are responsible for the values that guide the culture of the organisation; values which speak to and impact every member of the school or trusts community, and listen to what it is saying.

As strategic leaders accountable to stakeholders for the performance of all pupils, governing boards need to understand the needs of the pupils, their families and the community: the fourth core function of governing boards is to ensure that stakeholder voices are heard.

Governing boards should look outwards to their communities as well as inside the school gate, helping cement the understanding and the links between schools and those communities.

The annual school governance survey has been running since 2011 and is the largest survey of its kind, this year achieving 6,864 responses. This year, governors and trustees were asked for their views and experience on a range of topics relating to pupil success and wellbeing, their school/trust's vision, strategy and ethos, accountability and stakeholder engagement along with of course, the impact of coronavirus as experienced by the end of May. As governing boards listen to their pupils, one issue they have heard their pupils passionately talking about is environment and sustainability, as an issue that young people are prioritising, so this year is also the first year we have asked specifically about environment and sustainability in the survey.

6,864 respondents engaged with the survey

In this series

- Leadership and staffing
- Finance and funding
- Governance volunteers
- Governance practice
- Multi academy trust governance
- Pupils, communities and accountability

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Key findings

Here's what governors and trustees told us about how they support disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND, their approach to strategy and stakeholder engagement and their views on accountability.



- 01 Almost three quarters of school governors and trustees believe that cuts to local authority services have had an adverse effect on their school (74%), an increase of 28% of respondents from 2015.
- 02 Over half of governors/trustees report that their school(s) provide additional services for disadvantaged families (54%), most commonly providing assistance for purchasing and/or washing school uniform (37%), and giving advice on income and benefits (24%).
- 03 The proportion of respondents reporting that their school/trust provide meals outside of term time was more than three times higher than 2019 (13% compared to 4%), while the proportion of respondents reporting the provision of food banks had more than doubled (17% compared to 8% in 2019).
- 04 COVID-19 has led to schools providing additional services to families of disadvantaged pupils. Over a third of respondents (36%) reported providing food via a collection or delivery service when asked how their school or trust was providing support to disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic.
- 05 Support for pupils with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) was one of the three biggest challenges facing their school for nearly a quarter of respondents. However, there were varying practice in how boards monitor and elevate the status of SEND in their school with those governing in mainstream settings less likely to engage with key stakeholders when shaping their provision for these pupils.
- 06 Less than half of governors and trustees believe that the inspection system has a positive impact on the school system (47%) despite most governors and trustees believing that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school (80%).
- 07 The organisation's vision and strategy is the most influential factor in the design and provision of the curriculum across all education settings, ahead of Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework, performance measures, government policy and funding constraints.
- 08 Almost half of governors and trustees (44%) surveyed report that their board had taken action in relation to climate change.
- 09 60% of respondents would support the introduction of ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders as a fourth core function for governing boards with only 9% opposing its inclusion.
- 10 Monitoring the results of surveys as a form of stakeholder engagement has risen in the past year – from 56% to 70% for staff surveys, from 59% to 69% for pupil surveys and from 73% to 86% for parent/carer surveys.
- 11 Many governors and trustees do not feel their work is seen or valued. Less than one in five governors/trustees believe that the general public understands and values the role and contribution to schools (18%), while only two in five believe that parents have a good understanding of the governor/trustee role (40%).

Findings

- Pupil wellbeing
- Ethos, vision and strategy
- Greener governance
- Accountability and Ofsted
- Governing boards and stakeholders

Pupil wellbeing

The wider role of schools

Over half of respondents report that their school or trust provides additional services for families in need (54%). This marks a small but notable increase from the past few years with 49% of respondents reporting providing an additional service for families in 2018 and 51% reporting the same in 2019.

The types of services provided, however, remain largely consistent with the most to least common services provided being:

1. Financial support purchasing school uniforms and/or washing school uniforms: 37%
2. Advice about income and benefits: 24%
3. Food banks: 17%
4. Meals outside of term time: 13%
5. Emergency loans: 2%

There was also a notable increase in respondents reporting that their school offers an enhanced food provision; in 2019, only 4% of those surveyed reported that their school provided meals outside term time, this rose to 13% in 2020 and 17% reported providing food banks

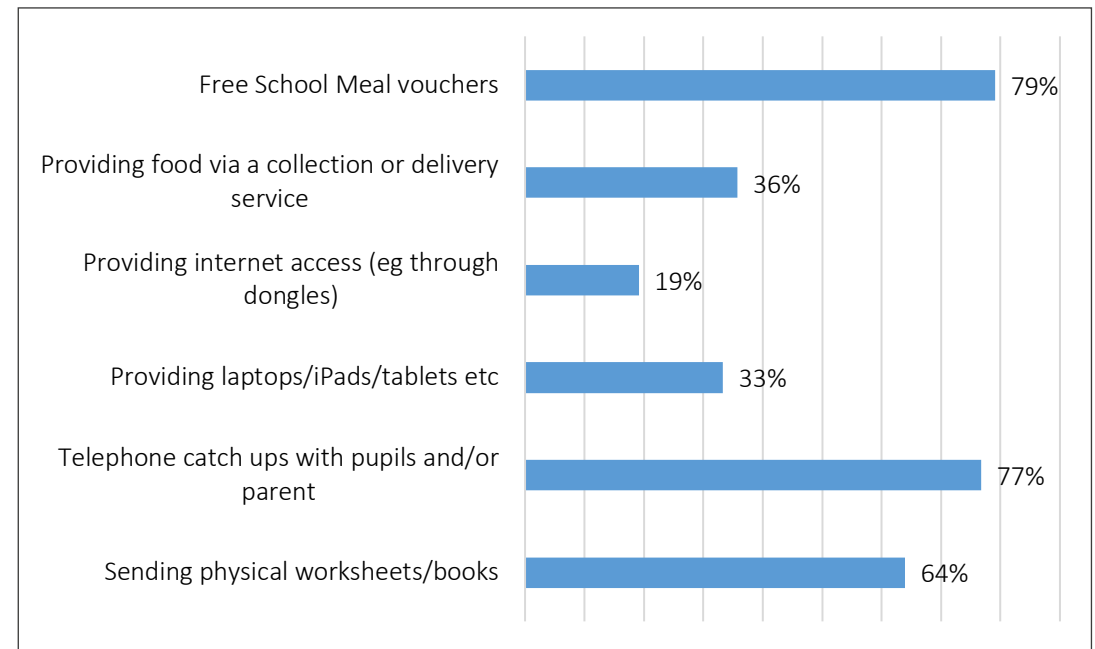


Figure 1, bar chart showing how respondents reported their school or trust was supporting disadvantaged pupils during lockdown

compared with only 8% in 2019. It is likely the wider impact of COVID-19 and the extension of the free school meals programme outside of term time has in part led to these findings.

Almost three quarters of respondents (74%) agreed that cuts to local authority (LA) services had had an adverse effect on their school(s), an increase of 28% of respondents compared with respondents in 2015. Those in non-academy settings were much more likely to agree, with 81% of LA maintained school respondents agreeing, compared to 65% in academy committees, 64% in single academy trusts, and 61% of MAT trustee respondents.

Nearly one in five respondents reported that one of the top three issues facing the school(s) they govern was broader services for children (eg health services, mental health support) (19%). In terms of the school's role in these providing wider services, a majority believe that schools should play a key role in the provision of wider children's services in their local area (60%). This marks a small decrease from 10 years ago when 67% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this.

Impact of COVID-19

As seen in figure 1, when asked how their school or trust was supporting disadvantaged pupils during the pandemic, free school meal vouchers were the most commonly cited offer of support reported by four in five governors/trustees (79%). This was followed by telephone catch-ups for pupils and/or parents (77%), sending physical worksheets/books (64%) and providing food via a collection or delivery service (36%).

The most consistently referenced challenge for respondents' schools and trusts during April and May when the survey was conducted were concerns over the provision for, and effects of lockdown on, vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils, with 1053 mentions. These largely focused on the lack of resources for e-learning, a widening of the attainment gap

for disadvantaged pupils, safety (in their own home) and the difficulty of keeping in contact with parents and carers of disadvantaged pupils, and food.

On a similar point, responses mentioned free school meals (FSM) as a challenge, especially in the early phases, noting the amount of additional work it required of staff ("the FSM vouchers have been far too time consuming") and the poor accessibility ("dealing with the school meal vouchers scheme. A major headache to set up. Extra costs incurred. When will they be reimbursed?").

A large proportion of respondents also raised the issue of safeguarding and concerns of safety for the whole school community, both those in the school building and those learning and teaching remotely.

Another significant challenge reported by governors and trustees was the engagement, or lack of engagement, from parents and pupils. Several respondents were concerned about the lack of contact from pupils and parents in relation to reporting on home-learning while some raised concerns about parents' ability to engage with their child's learning while dealing with their own unique challenges posed by the pandemic.

Other recurring themes included loss of educational momentum and the inequality of learning experiences. Many governors and trustees noted that the loss of learning was impacting their schools' momentum with regard to learning and curriculum. This was due to the disparity between the experiences pupils have/had learning at home with potentially long-lasting impacts which would extend beyond the period of lockdown.

Other cited challenges included the financial implications through loss of income from wraparound care or lettings and future unknown financial uncertainties and mixed messages from central government and local authorities and the general uncertainty regarding the future.

Supporting pupils with SEND

22% of governors and trustees surveyed report that support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is one of the three top issues facing the school(s) they govern. A higher proportion of respondents governing special schools placed this as one of their top concerns (36%). This was followed by those in nursery settings (26%), primary settings (23%), alternative provisions (20%) and 16% of those governing in secondary settings.

Governors and trustees indicated methods their board uses to elevate the status of SEND provision in their schools.

1. A SEND governor/trustee liaises regularly with the school's SENCO and keeps the board informed: 87%
2. SEND provision is evaluated effectively alongside other priorities in its development plan: 79%
3. Ensures every member of the board is made aware of SEND matters: 78%
4. Monitors the SEND funding the schools receives (eg in a similar way as pupil premium funding): 67%
5. Ensures that pupils, parents and carers are actively involved in the assessment and decision-making process for pupils with SEND at all stages: 60%
6. One of the board's committees has the responsibility of liaising with the SENCO and keeps the board informed: 49%

Practice did vary by educational phase and setting as seen in figure 2, with those governing in special and alternative provision settings particularly more likely to take a whole board approach than placing this responsibility with one member of the governing board. 84% of governors/trustees in special schools reported that every member of the board is made aware of SEND matters and 94% of those governing in alternative provision settings. Respondents in these settings were also more likely to report that others such as pupils, parents and carers were actively involved in the assessment and decision-making process.

Exclusions

Most governors and trustees surveyed had not sat on a governing board panel to review a permanent exclusion (66%) while those who had were most likely to have performed this task multiple times. 60% of governors and trustees who had been on a permanent exclusion panel had performed the role more than once. This was higher for those governing in secondary settings who typically have more pupils and therefore higher exclusion rates.

Of those who had sat on a panel to review an exclusion, 22% of governors and trustees reported that the panel had reinstated a pupil while 78% said they had not.

Ethos, vision, and strategy

When asked to what extent their governing board was involved in the design of their school or trust's vision or strategy, nine in 10 governors and trustees indicated that they were either 'very involved' in a collaborative process between the board, school leaders and stakeholders (51%) or 'involved to an extent' in which vision and strategy is discussed but school leaders had a stronger influence (40%). However, 8% of governors and trustees reported being 'hardly or not at all involved' with the board performing a monitoring role while 2% admitted being unsure.

Greener governance

When asked whether their governing board was doing anything in relation to climate change or environmental sustainability in their school, over two in five (44%) reported that their board had acted compared to 31% who reported that they had not. A quarter of those surveyed reported being unsure. When asked to expand upon the initiatives their board had launched, the most common responses were:

- Recycling including; recycling initiatives or improving recycling provision (eg approving the purchasing on recycling and compost bins), replacing playground

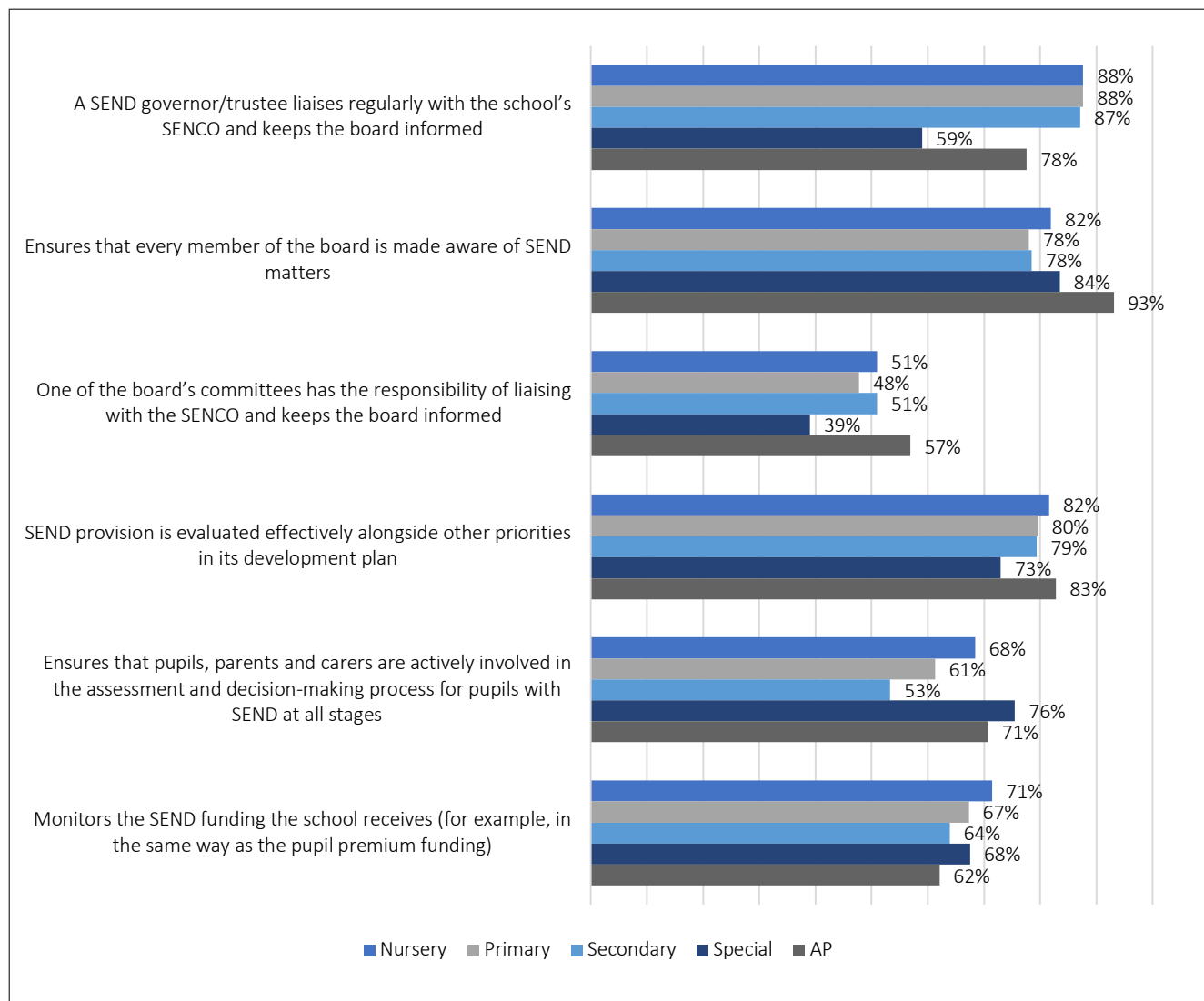


Figure 2, bar chart showing how respondents reported their board monitors and elevates the status of SEND in their school/trust

equipment with wooden or recyclable plastics, implementing a 'recycling and waste' policy encouraging recycling awareness and projects led by students/pupils on recycling such as eco clubs. A handful of respondents noted having a governor as an 'eco-link' to their school's environmental clubs/groups.

- Becoming more energy efficient; changing lighting in the school, reviewing provision of energy suppliers in search of 'greener' suppliers, replacing old windows to reduce the need for heating, installing solar panels. Many respondents also noted the financial benefit of becoming more energy efficient.
- Embedding climate change/sustainability into the curriculum to engage the school community on the impact of climate change. Some respondents noted 'outdoor learning' provision as a method of integrating the topic of sustainability into the curriculum.
- Other methods mentioned including phasing out the use of single plastics or becoming plastic free, ensuring that new builds are eco-friendly and energy efficient, using electronic board papers instead of physical ones and planting trees.

Curriculum

Over a quarter of governors and trustees reported that ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum was one of the biggest challenges facing the school(s) they govern (28%). Governors and trustees were also asked to rank which factors were influential in the design and provision of the curriculum. Overall, respondents reported that the most to least influential factors were:

1. The organisation's vision and strategy
2. Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework
3. Performance measures
4. Changes to government policy
5. Funding constraints
6. Difficulties recruiting staff for certain subjects.

Board type and school phase did not impact the most and least influential factors and governors/trustees regardless of setting consistently placed their organisation's vision and strategy as the most influential factor. As seen in figure 3, secondary and alternative provision governors/trustees were more likely to report that funding constraints had impacted their curriculum compared with changes to Ofsted's inspection framework.

Accountability and Ofsted

The vast majority of respondents agreed (54%) or strongly agreed (26%) that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school (80%) while just over one in ten disagreed (8%) or strongly disagreed (3%).

Despite most governors and trustees saying that their most recent Ofsted inspection gave a fair and accurate picture of their school, respondents were mixed about the overall impact of the inspection system on schools: 47% agreed or strongly agreed that the inspection system had a positive impact while 37% disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Those who viewed their most recent Ofsted as unfair and inaccurate were more likely to disagree that the inspection system had a positive impact (73%). Meanwhile 54% of those who agreed that their most recent Ofsted was fair and accurate said that they also agreed that the inspection system had a positive impact on schools.

	Nursery	Primary	Secondary	Special	Alternative provision
#1	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy	Organisation's vision and strategy
#2	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Funding constraints	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Funding constraints
#3	Performance measures	Performance measures	Performance measures	Funding constraints	Organisation's vision and strategy
#4	Changes in government policy	Changes in government policy	Changes to Ofsted's inspection framework	Changes in government policy	Changes in government policy
#5	Funding constraints	Funding constraints	Changes in government policy	Performance measures	Performance measures
#6	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects	Difficulties recruiting staff for subjects

Figure 3, table showing which factors were the most and least influential on curriculum design of respondents' schools by school phase

Governing boards and stakeholders

Stakeholder engagement

The most popular method of engaging with stakeholders was through monitoring the results of surveys: the three most reported stakeholder engagement strategies were parent/carer surveys (86%), staff surveys (70%) and pupil surveys (69%). Surveys have increased in usage across the past five years, as shown in figure 4, while other methods of engagement such as observing the pupil/student council, contributing to the school newsletter/bulletin and holding staff consultations have fallen considerably in use.

Breaking these results down by stakeholder group shows that governing boards are not engaging with all groups equally. While 97% of governors/trustees reported that their board engages with parents, this fell to 83% for engaging with pupils while only 74% had engaged with staff. While how respondents are engaging with stakeholders appears mixed, 60% said they would support the introduction of ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders as a fourth core function for governing boards.

Stakeholder perceptions of the role

Governors and trustees believe that stakeholders have a mixed understanding of their governance role, as seen in figure 5. While 92% of governors and trustees believe that senior leaders at their schools accurately understand and value their role, this fell to 78% for other members of school staff and only just over half felt that the wider education sector has an accurate understanding (53%).

Meanwhile only two in five respondents believe that parents have a good understanding of the role of governing boards (40%) which falls to just under a third for pupils within their school(s) (32%). A similar proportion agreed that other organisations such as employers and universities understood the role, despite these organisations being key to governance recruitment while the general public were seen as the group

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Monitoring results of a parent/carer survey	70%	73%	78%	73%	86%
Monitoring results of a pupil survey	52%	56%	61%	59%	69%
Monitoring results of a staff survey	51%	47%	59%	56%	70%
Met with or observed pupil/student council	71%	54%	54%	49%	49%
Invited pupils to attend governing board meetings	25%	20%	20%	18%	22%
Contributed to school newsletter/bulletin	61%	53%	53%	52%	47%
Attended parents' evenings	65%	59%	60%	57%	60%
Updated parents via the school website	69%	62%	62%	56%	56%
Held a staff consultation	77%	42%	47%	45%	27%
Held pupil focus groups	26%	18%	17%	16%	22%

Figure 4, table showing methods of stakeholder engagement across the years (2016 -2020)

that least understood and valued governance roles with less than one in five believing the public to have an accurate understanding or valuing their role (18%).

Resources for governing boards



KNOWLEDGE CENTRE

In the Knowledge Centre, you will find a variety of guidance and information on topics relating to governance and education. Resources that will help you navigate the topics covered in this report include:

- [Exclusions – guidance for governing boards](#)
- [Curriculum](#)
- [Being strategic: a guide for governing boards](#)
- [Creating a school vision](#)
- [SEND](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: behaviour](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: curriculum](#)
- [Questions for governing boards to ask: engaging parent](#)
- [COVID-19 recovery](#)
- [Parental engagement: a guide for governing boards](#)
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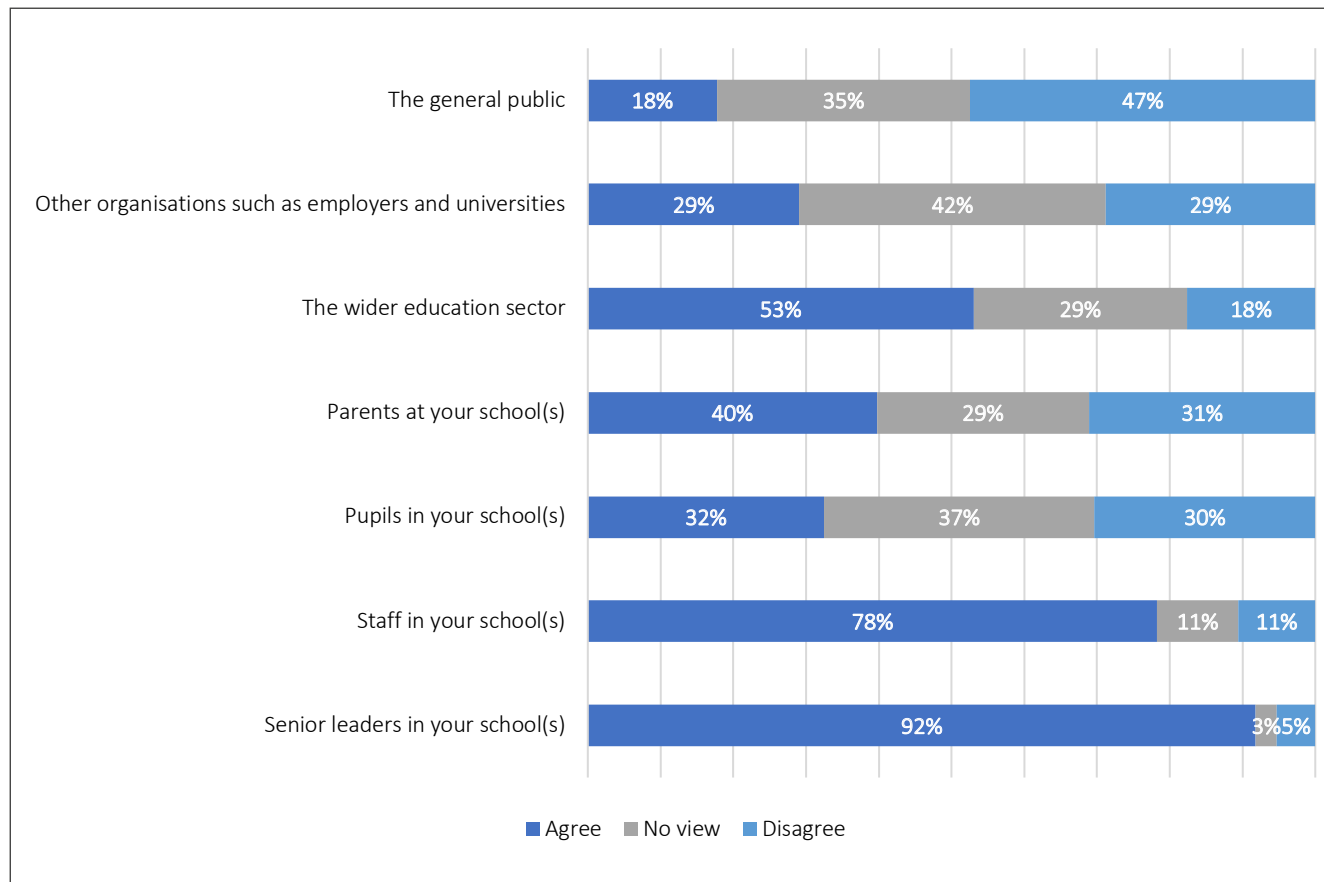


Figure 5, bar chart showing whether respondents agree or disagree their role is accurately understood and valued by different groups

Methodology

These findings are the results of a survey conducted between Tuesday 21 April and Tuesday 26 May 2020. The survey was open to all governors, trustees, and academy committee members (often also called local governors) of state-funded schools in England and 6,864 individuals engaged with the survey. Participants were self-selecting and therefore this survey is not a representative sample. However, the respondents who filled in the survey broadly match the national picture, being proportional to schools in England by phase, type, school structure and region.



	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
LA maintained schools	57%	61%
Academies within trusts	43%	39%

	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
East of England	12%	7%
East Midlands	9%	12%
London	12%	9%
North East	5%	4%
North West	15%	20%
South East	15%	19%
South West	11%	12%
West Midlands	11%	8%
Yorkshire and Humber	10%	8%

	State-funded schools in England	Survey respondents
Nursery	2%	10%
Primary	76%	65%
Secondary	16%	21%
Special	5%	4%
Alternative provision or pupil referral unit	2%	1%

About us

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

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