

Methodology for the annual school and trust governance survey 2021

For the eleventh consecutive year, NGA has run the annual school and trust governance survey. It is the largest survey of its kind and provides an extensive overview of the governance of state funded schools in England. While not all respondents answered every question, this survey provides unrivalled insight on the demographic, views and experiences of one of England’s largest volunteer forces. The survey is not just for NGA’s membership – it was open to all school governors, trustees and academy committee members between 6 May and 11 June 2021 via the online surveying website SmartSurvey.

In total, 3,848 respondents engaged with the survey. We are also grateful to our partners, including local authorities and local governance associations that distributed the survey through their own networks. While the survey obtains many responses, it is still a relatively small sample of the total school governance population and relies on self-reported data from self-selecting participants. The survey is completely anonymous to encourage individuals to share their thoughts and opinions freely. However, there are markers which indicate that the distribution of respondents and their school setting broadly matches the national picture by school phase, type, structure and region. By chance rather than by design, respondents are very nearly representative of the state sector in England: any significant variations are reported in the findings.

Representativeness

As the survey was disseminated predominantly through NGA’s channels, 78% of respondents reported that they were members of NGA. However, the views and experiences of those who are and those who are not NGA members remain similar on most issues.

As can be seen in figure 1, survey respondents from different school structures are very closely in line with the proportion of local authority maintained schools in England and academies within single or multi academy trusts.

	State funded schools in England	Survey respondents
LA maintained	57%	56%
Academies within trusts	43%	42%

Figure 1: Percentage of school structures within England compared with proportion of survey respondents within each structure

Figure 2 shows respondents to the survey have a largely proportional distribution across different phases. However, those governing in nursery settings are overrepresented and there is slightly higher proportion of respondents governing in secondary settings and a slightly lower proportion of respondents governing in primaries compared to school distribution nationally.

	State funded schools in England	Survey respondents
Nursery	2%	10%
Primary	69%	47%
Secondary	14%	19%
Special	4%	4%
Alternative provision or pupil referral unit	1%	1%

Figure 2: percentage of school phases within England compared with proportion of survey respondents within each phase [this does not include infant, junior, lower or middle phases]

Survey respondents are from all nine English regions and are predominantly in line with the regional spread.

	State funded schools in England	Survey respondents
East Midlands and East of England	21%	20%
London	12%	10%
North East	5%	6%
North West	15%	14%
South East	15%	19%
South West	11%	10%
West Midlands	11%	10%
Yorkshire and Humber	10%	10%

Figure 3: percentage of schools across all nine English regions compared to proportion of survey respondents within regions.

The survey is skewed towards chairs of governing boards with just over a third of respondents reporting that they are chair or co-chair of their board (34%). 13% of respondents reported that they were vice-chair of their board while 41% were other governors or trustees. 3% of respondents reported that they were in ex-officio roles on their governing board (eg a senior executive leader). There was also a broad range of perspectives offered by those new to school governance and more experienced governors and trustees with 25% of respondents having governed for under two years while 44% had been governing for over eight years.