

Annual school and trust governance survey

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NCA Insight



Acknowledgements

NGA would like to thank the respondents that took the time to complete the survey and share their views and experiences of school and trust governance. The valuable data joins a collection of longitudinal data and guides NGA's work to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards.

We are also grateful to the NGA team who shaped this report. Megan Tate, Bami Olukayode and Fiona Fearon interpreted survey responses and authored the report, with editorial support from Ella Colley.

“ My membership enables me to feel I belong to a national body that is providing for my needs and helping to shape and move governance forward nationally. ”

NGA member (2024 achievements report)



NGA is the national membership association for governors, trustees and governance professionals in England's state schools and trusts.

We empower those in school and trust governance with valuable resources, expert support and e-learning. Together, we're raising standards and shaping stronger governance to ensure every pupil can thrive today – and tomorrow.

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Foreword

It is hard to capture in words the generosity, commitment, experiences and convictions shared over 15 years of NGA annual governance surveys. What you read in our survey reports can only ever tell part of the story. Yet herein lies its true power - not as a complete picture, but as a window into the remarkable dedication that quietly shapes our education system, one governing board at a time.



Sam Henson,
Deputy Chief
Executive, NGA

Since we first started the survey, the education landscape has shifted dramatically and so have the expectations placed upon schools. As well as exploring familiar territory this year – from funding and staffing through to safeguarding and academisation – we also start to see the impact of fewer people having fewer children over the last decade. This is an evolving story, one that will have ripple effects in the coming years. While the resulting challenges are clear, boards are responding proactively as this long-term trend becomes more widely recognised.

Understanding and communicating the experiences of governors and trustees will always be central to NGA's work. But perhaps now more than ever we also need to emphasise how reliant the sector is on good governance. While this perspective is too often overlooked, the enduring resolve of governance continues to demonstrate its value. As our findings show, governors and trustees are using their influence to create real change, from developing an ambitious vision through to strategic oversight of the curriculum and essential stewardship of taxpayer money.

Many respondents may now be slightly less worried about school and trust finances in light of the government's recent spending review. However, financial challenges remain the most pressing issue for boards and our findings make clear that this will remain a significant concern unless more is done urgently. Nowhere is this financial strain more visible than in the support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Over the last year, this is the issue that has intensified the most and is now the top strategic priority for boards as well as an increasing challenge.

SEND, along with workforce and accountability, has also become one of the three strategic governmental priorities being tackled collectively through the Department for Education (DfE) Improving Education

Together (IET) programme. NGA is part of these discussions, ensuring that the voice of the governance community directly influences policy developments.

Despite all of these pressures, challenges and new initiatives, the rich tapestry of survey responses reveal the staggering depth of understanding that boards bring to the education system. Close ties to local communities underscore a deeply positive picture of boards working alongside school and trust leaders, offering a clear view of the issues facing schools and a diverse viewpoint to explore resolutions and improvement. Of course this comes as no surprise to NGA. Our mission is to ensure it comes as no surprise to policy makers and sector leaders.

As other public services retreat, schools are doing the opposite. They are helping to fill the gaps through mental health support, wraparound care and uniform provision. They are building long term pathways to an ambitious education system that is not only sustainable, but full of care, love, kindness, energy, innovation and aspiration.

But we should also acknowledge the need for governance to evolve. Despite growing awareness, the diversity of those serving as governors and trustees still fails to reflect the communities we serve. The drive for inclusive governance must not be allowed to meander and drift off. The limited signs of improvement, while encouraging, are not nearly good enough.

So, there is much to recognise and celebrate. As reforms continue to take shape, NGA looks forward to another productive school year. To those of you who contributed to the survey, thank you. Your insights put us in the strongest possible position to influence policymakers with an evidence base that cannot be ignored. It is your voice that gives us the platform to make sure governing board perspectives are not only listened to, but heard loud and clear.

Executive summary

About the Annual Governance Survey

The Annual School and Trust Governance Survey provides a comprehensive overview of school and trust governance in state-funded schools in England. Responses play a crucial role in shaping the representation of, and support available for, governing boards as well as shining a light on the priorities and challenges facing England's schools and trusts.

Conducted by NGA for 15 consecutive years, the online survey engaged over 3,000 governors and trustees this year, with a significant proportion of respondents identifying as NGA members. The survey data captures trends across roles, regions, school phases and governance structures.

The report's findings echo the wider struggles that the state education sector is currently navigating. Amidst a period of rapid governmental change, a legacy of struggle remains, marked by ongoing financial pressures, rising pupil needs – particularly in SEND provision – and challenges in teacher and governor recruitment. In the face of tightening budgets and ageing infrastructure, schools and trusts are working to maintain standards and pupil wellbeing, often stepping in to fill gaps left by other public services.

15

The Annual Governance Survey is now in its 15th consecutive year

85%

of survey respondents are NGA members

More than
3000

governors and trustees engaged with this year's survey

32%

of survey respondents are chairs

Key findings

The SEND system has broken

Supporting pupils with SEND saw the highest growth as both a top challenge (**63%**) and priority (**53%**) this year, reflecting mounting pressure on schools to meet increasingly complex needs. This comes amid a sharp rise in SEND specific challenges, particularly access to funding (**84%**) and securing education, health and care (EHC) plans (**67%**), highlighting systemic strain across SEND provision.

Confidence in the impact of governance is high



85% of governors and trustees say their board made a positive impact on their school or trust's strategic direction and outcomes in the past year. Top areas of impact include financial oversight (**57%**), educational outcomes (**50%**), and strategic vision (**50%**).

Schools are stepping up, but at a cost



Nearly **60%** of schools are managing to deliver additional services beyond their core remit, with **26%** adapting provision and **33%** managing within existing resources. However, **20%** say this is placing significant pressure on their capacity, raising concerns about sustainability without additional support.

While governance workforce challenges remain, optimism emerges



Fewer governors and trustees report having two or more vacancies on their board (**39%** down five percentage points), fewer finding recruitment difficult (**66%**, down 10 percentage points), and a slight decline in those considering resignation (**26%** down four percentage points).

Full impact of private school VAT changes are yet to come

Just **3%** of boards report increased admissions due to private school VAT plans, with a further **8%** expecting a rise soon. Secondary schools are most likely to have seen or anticipate an impact.

Falling rolls are intensifying financial strain



36% of respondents say their school finances have been impacted by falling pupil numbers and they have made plans to mitigate this. This has risen by six percentage points with the pressure felt greatest in early years and primary settings.

Financial pressures are at breaking point

Almost **70%** of boards now cite balancing the budget as a top challenge, the highest level we've recorded. Just **54%** can balance income and expenditure, while **45%** will rely on efficiency savings in the medium to long term. Schools are increasingly looking at renegotiating contracts (**55%**) and staff restructuring (**50%**) to save money long term.

A neutral attitude towards the new government



This year saw an **11%** rise in respondents expressing a neutral view of government performance. While satisfaction levels remain steady (**9%**), the shift suggests many in the sector are adopting a wait-and-see approach as they look for signs of positive change.

MAT interest up, but caution remains



A record number of schools considered joining a multi academy trust (MAT) in the past 12 months (**29%**), with only **42%** ruling it out – the lowest to date. But while consideration is up, with just **15%** planning to proceed and **13%** unsure, it's clear that while MATs remain firmly on the radar, many schools are taking a more cautious, selective approach.

Local tier priorities shift and functions condense



Fewer local boards are reviewing attainment data (down from **78%** to **66%**) or monitoring academy budgets (**48%** to **35%**). Drops are also seen in stakeholder engagement (**65%** to **56%**) and safeguarding oversight (**89%** to **84%**).

Rising staffing concerns centre on the nature of working in a school

While workload, wellbeing (**64%**), and pay (**35%**) remain key issues, there's growing recognition of the need to improve the overall offer to staff. The ability to offer flexible working (**11%**), meaningful professional development, and clear career progression (**9%**) were also challenges that saw a significant rise this year.

Safeguarding pressures continue



Nearly **50%** report rising concerns in the past year, continuing the upward trend we've tracked since the COVID-19 pandemic. The most common priorities remained bullying and cyberbullying (**61%**), neglect (**51%**), and domestic abuse (**48%**).

MAT-wide Ofsted focus areas emerge



Boards identified school improvement (**72%**) and financial/resource management (**59%**) as top priorities for MAT-wide inspection. Executive leadership (**50%**) and trust board decision-making (**40%**) also ranked highly.

Representation of minoritised ethnic groups takes a modest step forward



Almost **70%** of boards now **7%** of governors and trustees identify as being from an ethnic minority, a two-percentage point increase since last year and the highest level recorded to date.



Recommendations

To address the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities identified by this survey, NGA calls on the government to:

Think SEND

Conduct urgent reform, with an explicit timeframe that will once and for all trigger a fundamental reset of the SEND system. NGA calls on the government to urgently increase targeted SEND funding and deliver system-wide reform to meet rising demand and avoid a projected £8 billion deficit by 2027–28.

This must include faster EHCP assessments, improved access to specialist services and investment in the profession supporting SEND, all forming part of a sector agreed coherent national strategy for an inclusive, equitable SEND system.

Build financial sustainability to reflect today's financial realities

With nearly **70%** of boards citing balancing the budget as their top challenge, the case for urgent investment remains clear. NGA urges the government to build on the principles of the National Funding Formula by ensuring it keeps pace with inflation, future developments in pay settlements, reflects regional cost pressures, and supports the increasing number of schools facing declining pupil numbers, particularly in early years and primary.

We also call for the reinvestment of funding released by falling rolls to secure increased per-pupil and pupil premium allocations. In parallel, schools need increased high-needs funding to keep pace with rising SEND demand – because while long-term reform is welcome, schools cannot wait for it to meet the needs of today's children and young people.

Recognise the expanded community role schools now occupy

With over half of schools reporting rising demand for services such as mental health support, wraparound care, and safeguarding, the government must formally recognise the expanded social role schools now play. This means providing dedicated, co-funded resources to relieve unsustainable pressures on school budgets, a strategy for communicating to parents the additional pressures placed on schools, and a national plan for ensuring vulnerable pupils and families continue to receive the support they need.

Pay more attention to the vital role of governance and explore new national support mechanisms

With **66%** of boards struggling to recruit and only **8%** of governors aged under 40, the governance pipeline continues to be at risk. NGA calls on the government and sector bodies to jointly invest in national, inclusive recruitment strategies, especially targeting underrepresented groups. There must also be a focus on training, mentoring, and retention to sustain a skilled and diverse governance workforce.

Unlock the full potential of local governance in MATs

Local volunteers are rooted in the communities their schools serve and offer vital insight into pupil need, parental voice, and local priorities. And yet their involvement in key decisions is proving increasingly inconsistent. To strengthen MAT governance, government should clearly communicate the value of local governance, improve delegation frameworks, and support local input in strategic decisions with meaningful accountability.

Strengthen workforce conditions and empower employers with innovative approaches

With staff wellbeing a leading staffing concern for governing boards, national policy must do more to recognise the role of boards as employers and support schools to become great places to work. Government should embed expectations for flexible working, workload reduction, and professional development into statutory frameworks, and provide the funding needed to deliver these improvements meaningfully and equitably.

**“We are a strong,
committed
and supportive
governing body.”**



Celebrating governance

Our 2025 survey paints an encouraging picture of governance in action, with respondents highlighting the impact their boards have made, the progress achieved, and what would help them go even further.

A positive impact on schools and trusts

An overwhelming majority of respondents felt that their governing board had made a positive impact on their school or trust's strategic direction and outcomes over the past year. Nearly half (47%) of respondents strongly agreed that their board had made a meaningful contribution, and a further 38% somewhat agreed.

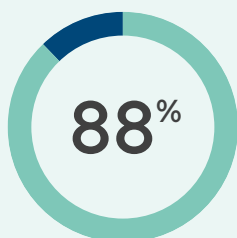
This sense of collective efficacy, believing that together the board can influence outcomes, is vital not only for morale but for sustaining the energy and commitment needed to fulfil such a demanding role.

“ We have a number of governors who are seen – by staff and parents – to be strongly committed. ”

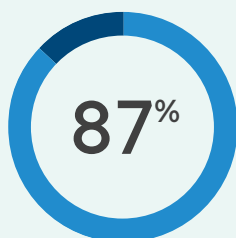
However, perceived impact varies depending on the type of governance structure. Local governors within MATs were least likely to strongly agree that their board made a positive impact, just 34% compared to over 50% of maintained school governors and MAT trustees.

85% agree that their board had made a positive impact on their school or trust's strategic direction and outcomes over the past year.

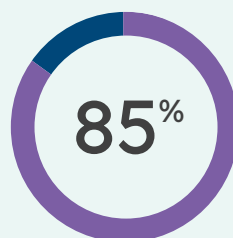
This disparity reflects broader questions around the role, visibility and agency of local governance within MAT structures. NGA has consistently advocated for strong, purposeful local governance that is respected, supported and empowered to make decisions that reflect the needs of the community. Where academy committees (sometimes known as local governing bodies or similar) are treated as vital contributors to strategy and community connection, their sense of impact is likely to rise. But where their role is ambiguous or tokenistic, it can lead to disempowerment.



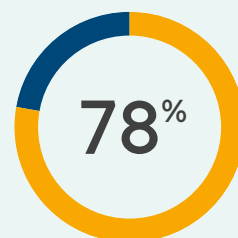
Maintained school governing body



Single academy trust board



Multi academy trust board



Academy committee

I feel that my governing board has made a positive impact on the strategic direction and outcomes of my school or trust in the past year
(% of respondents that strongly agree or agree)

Where impact is felt most strongly

When asked where boards were having the greatest impact, financial oversight and resource allocation was the most frequently selected area across nearly every board type, region, and school phase. But while this might suggest a shared confidence in financial stewardship, a closer look reveals some interesting tensions.



In which of the following areas do you feel your governing board has had the most positive impact over the past year?

80% of those under 40 agree their board had made a positive impact vs **24%** of those aged 40 and over

Maintained school governors were most likely to select financial oversight as a key area of impact (26%), while only 12% of local governors within MATs did so. This gap is not just statistical; it reflects the structural realities of the local tier often operating with more limited decision-making power when it comes to finances.



In special schools, financial oversight was selected by **23%** of respondents, slightly above average. But in alternative provision (AP) or pupil referral units, just **17%** reported this as an area of impact.

18%  **26%**

Only 18% of boards with fewer than eight members said financial oversight was a key impact area, compared with 26% of those with 14 or more.

Among boards unable to balance income and expenditure without borrowing, **25%** still cited financial oversight as an area of positive impact.



Local governors in MATs (**22%**) were slightly more likely than others to select education outcomes and curriculum oversight as a top area of impact.

Age was also a factor in perceived impact. Among governors and trustees aged under 40, 80% agreed their board had made a positive impact – an encouraging show of confidence from a group often newer to governance. In contrast, only 24% of respondents aged 40 and over felt their board had made a positive impact. This may reflect generational differences in perception, with younger volunteers perhaps feeling more engaged, whilst others with a longer-term strategic perspective set the bar for 'impact' higher. Rather than a disconnect, these differences offer boards a valuable opportunity to draw on diverse perspectives.

Perceptions of financial impact remain strong even in financially pressured contexts. Among boards unable to balance income and expenditure without borrowing, 25% still cited financial oversight as an area of positive impact, higher than some better-resourced counterparts. This finding is complex. On one hand, it may reflect pride in resilience, boards steering their schools through hardship, making tough decisions, and holding leaders to account in testing conditions. On the other, it highlights how stretched finances have become the central preoccupation for some boards, perhaps to the point where impact is measured by survival rather than progress. Impact may not always be tied to abundance; it may emerge just as strongly from navigating constraint.

Educational outcomes and curriculum oversight came second overall, with 50% of respondents citing it as an area of strength. Here, local governors within MATs were slightly more likely than others to select this area (22%), reinforcing their deep community connection and role in shaping the lived experience of pupils. This also points to the distinctive position of academy committees within MATs: while they may have less say over finances, they often hold delegated responsibilities for monitoring teaching, learning, and pupil outcomes. As such, their sense of impact is most keenly felt where they are closest to the work of schools. It also highlights the importance of ensuring that academy committees are empowered to engage meaningfully in discussions around school improvement, not just compliance or performance management.

“ We are a strong and diverse governing body. We have contributed to the Ofsted preparation and supported [senior leaders] for a positive inspection. We have been able to give positive direction and support to initiatives regarding attendance and aspects of curriculum reflection. ”

Other areas, like pupil wellbeing and safeguarding (17%) and staff wellbeing and retention (10%), may have drawn fewer responses overall, but they remain vital. In particular, pupil wellbeing was more likely to be highlighted by those governing on academy committees, special schools, and AP settings, where need is often greater and the role of the board in supporting inclusive practice is significant.

Opportunities to increase impact

Despite strong perceptions of impact, respondents also identified how their board could be further supported to make an even greater difference. The most selected factor by a significant margin was increased school funding (70%), highlighting the wider context in which boards operate and how strategic effectiveness is heavily influenced by the resources available to schools and trusts.

Following this, 57% of respondents called for increased government support and recognition of the role that governing boards play in education. This reflects a desire for greater national acknowledgement of governance's value, not just in policy rhetoric but in practical backing and visibility.

Just under a third of respondents (30%) highlighted the need for more diverse skills and expertise on the board, while 25% pointed to stronger local authority support. These findings suggest that while internal dynamics matter, many boards are also looking outward for structural, financial, and institutional support that enables them to govern effectively.

Access to high-quality training (18%) and professional support (11%) also featured, reinforcing the message that boards are hungry for development, but that support must be tailored, relevant and easily accessible.

Relational dynamics matter too. While cited by fewer respondents, 16% pointed to stronger relationships with their executive leaders as a key enabler of impact, with 14% identifying relationships within the board itself. It's a reminder that governance is both technical and relational: it thrives not only on knowledge, but on trust, communication and shared purpose.

It is notable that these findings also overlap with what the data tells us about some of the challenges boards are facing, particularly around recruitment and retention.

What would support your board to increase impact?

70%

Increased school funding



57%

Increased government support and recognition of governing boards' role in education



30%

More diverse skills and expertise on the board



25%

Stronger local authority support for governance



21%

Clearer roles and responsibilities for board members



“We can’t reduce costs as there’s nothing we haven’t already done.”



Challenges and priorities



Top challenges

2023

Balancing the budget (52%)

Attendance (28%)

Support for pupils with SEND (24%)

2024

Balancing the budget (60%)

Support for pupils with SEND (37%)

Attendance (32%)

2025

Balancing the budget (68%)

Support for pupils with SEND (63%)

Staff wellbeing including workload (23%)

Top priorities

2023

Improving attainment (34%)

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum (32%)

Attendance (29%)

2024

Improving attainment (38%)

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum (34%)

Attendance (33%)

2025

Support for pupils with SEND (53%)

Improving attainment (50%)

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum (33%)

In 2025, the educational landscape has been shaped by a dynamic mix of financial pressures and the increasing diversity and demand of pupil needs. While these factors present significant challenges to school and trust boards, they are also important opportunities for governing boards to adapt and strengthen their strategic leadership.

Respondents were asked to identify the top three challenges and strategic priorities for their school/trust.

Challenges

The challenges facing schools and trusts represent the growing, complex, multifaceted needs of pupils in England.

Top challenges

68%

Balancing the budget

63%

Support for pupils with SEND

23%

Staff wellbeing including workload

22%

Attendance

22%

Falling pupil numbers

15%

Managing and improving premises

14%

Improving attainment

14%

The attainment of disadvantaged children

11%

Attracting high quality teaching staff

10%

Behaviour and exclusions

Balancing the budget has emerged as the most pressing concern for governors and trustees in 2025, with 68% highlighting it as a top challenge. This marks a sharp rise from 60% in 2024 and is now the highest level since we began asking this question. What's particularly striking is how unevenly this pressure is

felt across the sector. Nursery and primary schools appear to be bearing the brunt, with 74% of nurseries and 73% of primary schools identifying this as a top concern compared to 59% of secondaries. However, secondary schools are experiencing a faster rise, up 19 percentage points from last year.

Primary

Balancing budget
73%

Support for pupils
with SEND
68%

Falling pupil numbers
27%

Secondary

Balancing budget
59%

Support for pupils
with SEND
51%

Attendance
35%

Top challenges reported by phase

Financial pressures are intensified by the need for schools to meet the increasingly complex needs of children with SEND. The proportion of boards ranking SEND provision as a top challenge has risen dramatically, from 37% to 63%; a striking 26 percentage point jump. This significant shift highlights the growing demand on schools to deliver tailored, inclusive support with financially constrained resources.

The sharp rise in boards citing both SEND support and budget balancing as top challenges suggests a clear and growing interdependence between the two. Providing effective support for pupils with SEND often requires additional staffing, resources and specialist training, all of which place significant demands on already tight budgets. For many boards, the financial challenge is not separate from the challenge of supporting pupils with SEND but deeply connected, as they aim to deliver inclusive education but lack the funding to match the increasing level of need.

Staff wellbeing and workload remains a growing concern for governing boards, ranking as the third most frequently cited challenge. Overall, 23% of boards identified this as a key issue compared to 22% the previous year. The figure rises to 32% in special schools, where it also ranks as the third highest priority.

This concern reflects broader challenges around teacher recruitment and retention. With an increasing demand on educators, governing boards are acutely aware of the pressures placed on their workforce.

These financial strains inevitably spill over into staffing related issues. Primary boards were more likely to highlight staff wellbeing and workload as a major challenge (24%) compared to secondary boards (17%), suggesting that tighter budgets in early education settings may be placing a disproportionate burden on staff. Limited resources can restrict the ability to explore workload reduction initiatives, further intensifying pressure on teachers and school leaders. Governing boards are increasingly recognising that financial sustainability and staff wellbeing are not isolated issues, but mutually reinforcing priorities that require tailored approaches.

Priorities

The financial challenges identified, coupled with increasingly complex pupil needs, mean it's no surprise that supporting pupils with SEND has quickly become a leading strategic priority for governing boards (53%).

Top priorities

53%

Support for pupils
with SEND

50%

Improving
attainment

33%

Ensuring a broad
and balanced
curriculum

26%

Attendance

26%

Ensuring best use
of resources

24%

Staff wellbeing
including workload

14%

Developing and
retaining staff

12%

Ensuring pupil
premium makes
an impact

12%

Managing and
improving
premises

12%

Parental and
community
engagement

However, this sits within a broader context of long-standing commitments to core educational goals. Ensuring pupil attainment (50%) and broad and balanced curriculum (33%) also remain high priorities, demonstrating a determination to maintain high standards and equity in education, despite operational challenges.

Improving pupil attainment continues to rise over the years in importance as a strategic priority for governing boards. Improving attainment saw a 12 percentage point increase from 2024, continuing an upward trend. This reflects the sustained pressure on schools to deliver measurable academic outcomes, likely influenced by the ongoing impact of, and continued emphasis on, accountability through performance data. As boards strive to close attainment gaps and support pupil progress, the priority placed on educational outcomes remains central to their strategic vision.

Top priorities by phase

The continued emphasis on supporting pupils with SEND and delivering a broad, balanced curriculum across school phases reflects a system-wide dedication to inclusive education. This sustained focus, even in the face of significant financial and practical constraints highlighted throughout this report, underscores the determination of governing boards. It demonstrates the commitment to ensuring that all pupils receive a rich and equitable educational experience.

Across nurseries, primary, and all-through schools, governing boards continue to prioritise three core areas: improving attainment, ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum, and providing effective support for pupils with SEND. These priorities reflect a sustained commitment to both academic progress and inclusive education. However, in secondary schools, the picture shifts slightly. While attainment and curriculum remain key areas of focus, attendance has risen to become the second most cited strategic priority, identified by 37% of secondary boards. This change likely reflects increasing concerns about pupil engagement and the ongoing challenge of persistent absence, which has become more notable since the pandemic. For secondary boards, addressing attendance is now seen as critical not only to safeguarding and wellbeing, but also to ensuring long-term academic outcomes.

Primary

Support for pupils with special educational needs
57%

Improving attainment
51%

Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum
35%

Secondary

Improving attainment
57%

Support for pupils with SEND
39%

Attendance
37%

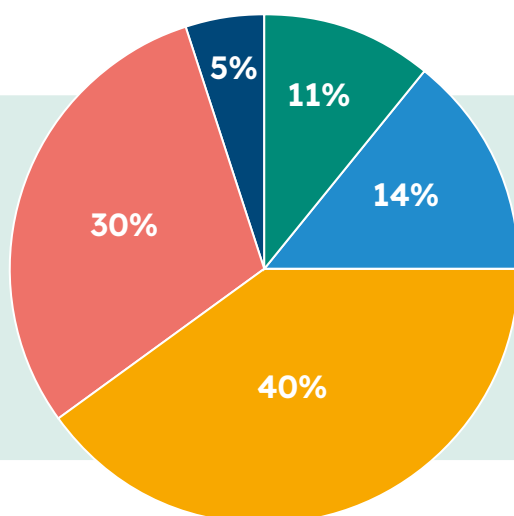
Top priorities reported by phase

“ We need funding to help meet these unmet needs primarily, once those are met, staff workload will reduce, attainment will improve as all children’s needs are met, contact from parents will lessen as fewer incidents that need dealing with. ”

Finance and funding

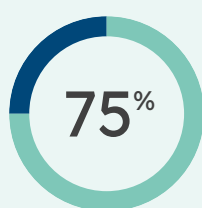
Financial oversight continues to be a central and increasingly complex responsibility for governing boards as schools face the dual pressures of rising costs and declining pupil numbers. Boards are working hard to balance income and expenditure while also ensuring their schools’ long term financial health.

For many boards, financial decision making now has direct implications for staffing, curriculum breadth and pupil support. When asked about the current financial position of their school or trust 54% can balance income and expenditure, down two percentage points from 2024 and continuing the downward trend since 2021. Survey responses reflect the growing intensity of these pressures, and the strategic responses boards are considering to secure financial sustainability.

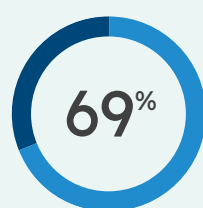


- We are able to balance income and expenditure, retaining a healthy surplus
- We are able to balance income and expenditure
- We are unable to balance income and expenditure without drawing on surplus from previous years
- We are unable to balance income and expenditure without licensed deficit from the local authority/loan from ESFA
- Don't know

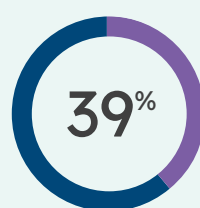
Top challenges to a balanced budget



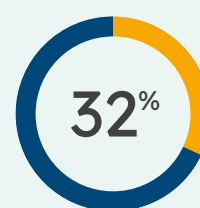
Staff pay costs



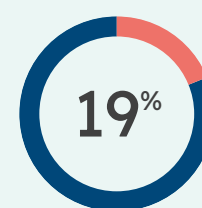
Cost of supporting SEND and high needs pupils



Projected pupil numbers



Infrastructure costs



Reduced income streams

Staff pay remains the most significant financial challenge for governing boards, with 75% identifying it as a key pressure when attempting to set a balanced budget. This challenge is persistent and the increase of 11 percentage points from 2024 highlights an ongoing strain on school budgets as pay costs outpace funding levels. The issue is felt widely across all school types and phases, underlining its systemic nature.

“ Schools across the trust are struggling to manage having adequately trained staff on payroll. A lot of money is spent on supply. Budget cuts have led to staff carrying out additional roles and responsibilities without pay and working longer hours. ”

Financial pressures vary in their intensity and impact across different settings. In nursery schools, where budgets are often tighter, the cost of supporting

pupils with SEND slightly outweighs staff pay as the most pressing concern. These schools are navigating the dual challenge of meeting rising SEND demand with limited resources, while also managing the broader financial pressures associated with maintaining high quality provision. This reflects a growing misalignment between demand and adequate funding that many boards are increasingly having to address as part of their financial strategy.

The rising cost of supporting pupils with SEND and those with high needs is becoming an increasingly prominent challenge for governing boards. This year, 69% of respondents identified it as a significant pressure when setting a balanced budget, up 9% from the previous year. This sharp increase reflects both the growing complexity of pupil needs and the widening gap between the support required and the funding available to deliver it effectively.

“ Our budget and the increasingly complex needs of SEND pupils and the resources needed to support them are our two greatest concerns. We are going to go into deficit next year ... We have tried to reduce costs whilst also finding ways to increase our income. But too many years of underfunding, multiple years of high utility costs, underfunded pay rises, and underfunded National Insurance increases have all affected our budgets. ”

Governing boards are expressing growing concern about their financial sustainability over the medium to long term. When asked about their financial outlook over the next three to five years, only 16% of respondents said they believe their school or trust was financially sustainable. Even among those who felt cautiously optimistic, nearly half (45%) acknowledged that this sustainability is conditional and dependent on drawing from efficiency savings or unspent funds. This paints a picture of widespread financial fragility where even perceived sustainability is often reliant on short term measures rather than long term security.

The declining financial confidence is evident across all types of schools and governance structures. Maintained schools are particularly affected, with only 55% of maintained school governors reporting financial sustainability. Alarming, 42% said they would not be financially viable without making significant structural or budgeting changes.

The worsening financial situation across the education sector demands urgent attention from governing boards and trust leaders. While many respondents

made clear that only increased government funding can fully resolve the issue, the survey highlights the practical steps boards are taking to build greater financial sustainability. These include reviewing contracts for goods and services (55%), restructuring staff (50%), income generation strategy (34%) and pursuing greater collaboration between schools (33%). These measures reflect a proactive effort to manage limited resources while maintaining stability and educational quality.

Financial sustainability measures

55%

Reviewing contracts for goods and services



50%

Restructuring staff



34%

Income generation strategy



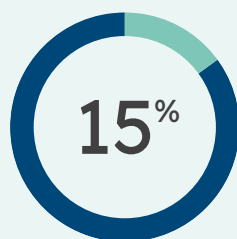
33%

Pursuing greater collaboration between schools

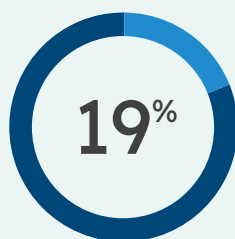


Which of the following measures is your board likely to take over the next 3-5 years to ensure financial sustainability of the school or trust?

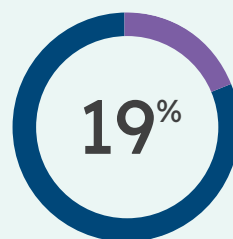
We are financially sustainable with current levels of funding and income



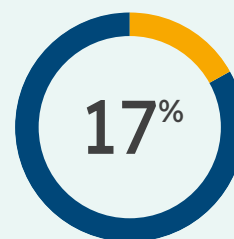
Maintained school governing body



Single academy trust board



Multi academy trust board



Academy committee

Staffing

This year, staffing concerns increasingly focus on the overall experience of working in a school, with workload and wellbeing now the most pressing issue, rising from 45% in 2023 to 64% in 2025. Pay remains a key concern at 35%, returning to its 2023 level after a dip in 2024. The importance of maintaining current staff structures has also grown steadily over the past three years, reaching 41%. Alongside these core issues, there is a noticeable shift toward improving the broader offer to staff. Schools are placing greater emphasis on flexible working, cited by 11%, and meaningful professional development and clearer career progression, mentioned by 9%.

When asked specifically about obstacles to recruiting and retaining staff, again the data brings attention to the increasing importance of the quality of the employment offer. While a lack of suitable candidates remains the most commonly cited recruitment and retention challenge, it has decreased by four percentage points to 60%. Managing workload and wellbeing jumped from 33% to 51%, while interest in career advancement within the school or trust doubled to 22%. Flexibility of role (17%) and access to professional development (6%) have also seen steady increases.


These trends suggest that recruitment and retention are no longer driven solely by candidate supply, but increasingly by how attractive schools are as employers, highlighting the need for a more compelling and supportive workplace proposition.

Variation across phases

Staffing concerns vary across nursery, primary, and secondary schools. Nurseries most frequently cite workload and wellbeing (64%) and maintaining the current staff structure (48%) as top concerns, while secondary schools are significantly more concerned with recruitment (42%) and retention (30%). They also show a slightly higher emphasis on pay (38%) and absence levels (23%), reflecting a potentially more challenging staffing environment. In contrast, primary schools tend to reflect more balanced concerns, with workload (66%), maintaining staff structure (45%), and pay (35%) being most prominent. Overall, while workload is a shared concern, secondary schools report more acute recruitment and retention challenges, whereas nurseries are more focused on structural stability.

Top three staffing concerns

64%
 Addressing workload and wellbeing issues

41%
 Maintaining the current staff structure


35%
 Pay


Rising concerns

Staffing concerns increasingly focus on the overall experience of working in a school. There is also a recognition that further work is needed to improve the broader offer to staff.

11%
 Flexible working


9%
 CPD and progression pathways


“Children arrive
at school
tired, hungry
and cold.”



Pupils, families and communities

Extended school services

With a rising number of families falling into poverty, schools are no longer just centres of learning; they have become front-line providers of social support, often stepping in to address needs that would traditionally fall to health, social care, or community services.

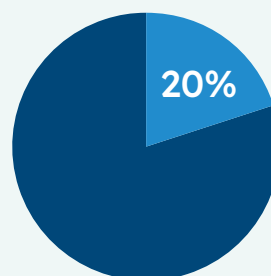
Governing boards report that this support now extends well beyond schools' educational responsibilities. Services include pastoral care, mental health provision, food assistance, and help accessing necessities.

These vital services are often delivered without dedicated funding or additional staffing, placing further pressure on already stretched resources. Nevertheless, schools and trusts continue to play a critical role in supporting vulnerable pupils and their families, driven by a deep commitment to their communities and a recognition of the broader conditions that impact learning and wellbeing.

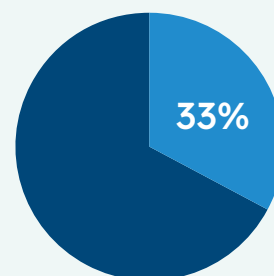
This year, a striking 51% of respondents reported an increase in the additional support their schools provided to pupils and families in the past 12 months. This highlights the growing demand for services that extend beyond education. Consistent with previous years, the most common forms of support offered include pre-loved or second-hand uniform provision (76%), wraparound care before and after school (64%), and breakfast provision (56%). Notably, there has been a 5 percentage point increase in the number of schools offering meals outside of term time, and a further 2 percentage point rise in those providing wraparound care. These trends perhaps reflect the expanding schools offer under labour's new policies.

“ Schools continue to be underfunded and families in the high deprivation area my school is located in are really struggling financially. ”

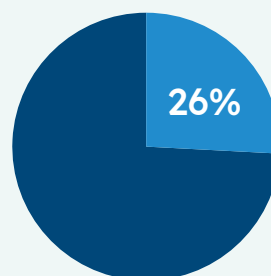
What is your perspective on your school or trust providing additional services to pupils and families?



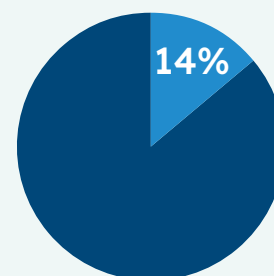
It is a significant concern and places undue pressure on our school or trust



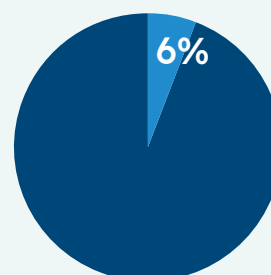
It is a challenge, but we are managing it within our existing resources



We have adapted to this shift and see it as part of our evolving role



Providing additional services is not a key focus for our school or trust



Other

20% of governing boards reported that providing additional, non-educational services is placing unsustainable pressure on their school or trust. This burden is not felt equally across the system, varying by both governance structure and school phase. For instance, 17% of academy committees reported experiencing undue pressure, compared to 24% of single academy trust (SAT) boards, suggesting that SATs may be particularly vulnerable due to limited capacity or fewer shared resources.

The impact is especially pronounced in early years settings. Among nursery schools, 27% of boards said that offering extended services like food provision, wraparound care, or family support places undue pressure on their school or trust. These findings reflect broader national concerns about the growing expectation that schools should fill the gaps left by underfunded health, social care, and early intervention services. In an increasingly stretched system, schools are being called upon to do more with less like supporting vulnerable pupils and families, often without corresponding increases in funding or infrastructure. This raises important questions about sustainability, fairness, and the evolving role of education providers in England.

“ It is essential to our families, but I really wish someone else could take responsibility for it, instead of everything falling on school's shoulders and conscience. ”

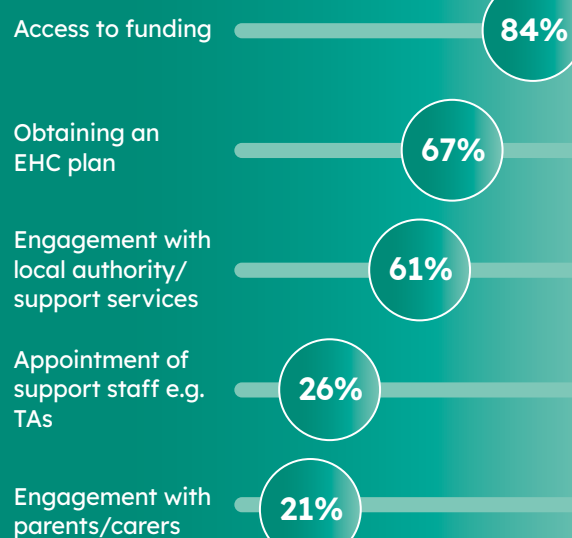
SEND

The survey results reveal that significant challenges continue to impact SEND provision. Despite the dedication and hard work of school leaders, staff, and governing boards, many schools struggle to provide effective support due to limited funding, shortages of qualified staff, and inconsistent access to external support services. Even those with strong SEND systems in place are facing barriers, as a lack of resources restricts their ability to meet the growing needs of their pupils.

When asked about the biggest challenges facing their school or trust in relation to pupils with SEND, access to funding emerged as the most pressing concern, cited by 84% of boards, a significant increase from

74% in 2024, and now at its highest recorded level. This issue was particularly noticeable in early years settings, with 89% of nurseries identifying it as their top challenge in relation to SEND.

Top SEND challenges



Beyond funding, boards also reported difficulties engaging with local authorities and support services (61%) and obtaining EHC plans (67%) as major barriers. The recruitment of support staff, while less frequently mentioned, still affected over a quarter of respondents (26%).

Special schools also reported the highest levels of difficulty in working with local authorities (70%), pointing to widespread strain in partnership working and service coordination. These findings underscore the growing pressure on the SEND system within the wider education sector and highlight the need for coherent, well-resourced support at all levels.

Special schools support pupils with complex needs and so are more reliant on additional support staff than mainstream settings. These roles are essential in delivering personalised, consistent care and learning support for children and young people with significant and varied needs.

However, reflecting broader recruitment challenges across the education sector, the appointment of support staff has become an increasing concern. 33% of special schools cited this issue as one of their top three challenges in relation to SEND, representing the highest proportion across all educational phases. These findings highlight particularly acute workforce shortages in settings that depend most heavily on skilled and experienced support staff, adding to the already considerable pressures faced by special schools operating within an under-resourced SEND system.

Safeguarding

Protecting the most vulnerable pupils and ensuring that every child feels safe and supported within their school community continues to be a fundamental priority for governing boards. While safeguarding has always been at the heart of school governance, a combination of post-pandemic pressures and the evolving digital landscape has heightened the complexity and urgency of this responsibility. Increased online activity, exposure to harmful content, and the rise of digital peer interactions have presented new safeguarding risks, particularly for younger and more vulnerable pupils.

This year's survey findings reveal that safeguarding concerns are not easing. Nearly half (49%) of all respondents reported an increase in safeguarding issues over the past year. Only 3% saw a decrease. The rise in concerns was most pronounced in secondary schools

(55%), compared to 47% in primary schools, highlighting how safeguarding risks can differ significantly across age groups and educational phases.

When asked about the nature of these issues, bullying and cyberbullying topped the list once again, cited by 61% of boards. These were followed by concerns around neglect (51%) and domestic abuse (48%) both of which have seen slight increases since last year. These persistent and rising challenges reflect the changing reality of young people's lives and underline the crucial role boards must play in ensuring that robust safeguarding strategies are embedded across schools and trusts. Supporting school leaders and staff in responding to these complex and sensitive issues remains a key governance priority, requiring both vigilance and collaboration.

Safeguarding priorities

2023

Bullying and cyberbullying
52%

Neglect
48%

Domestic abuse
45%

Emotional abuse
33%

Online abuse
28%

2024

Bullying and cyberbullying
64%

Neglect
48%

Domestic abuse
41%

Emotional abuse
33%

Online abuse
38%

2025

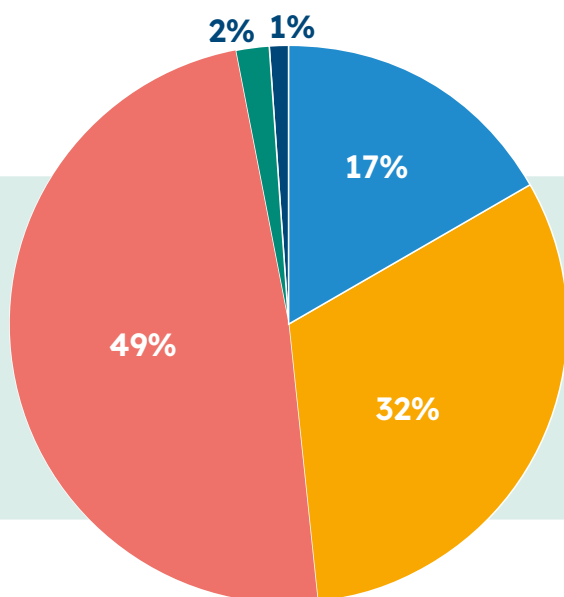
Bullying and cyberbullying
61%

Neglect
51%

Domestic abuse
48%

Emotional abuse
35%

Online abuse
34%



- Safeguarding concerns have significantly increased
- Safeguarding concerns have slightly increased
- Safeguarding concerns have remained broadly the same
- There has been a slight decrease in safeguarding concerns
- There has been a significant decrease in the number of safeguarding concerns

Environmental sustainability

As climate change and environmental responsibility rise up the national agenda, schools and trusts are increasingly recognising the importance of embedding sustainability into their operations and culture. From improving energy efficiency to promoting climate education, schools and trusts are beginning to explore how they can contribute to a greener future, despite financial and infrastructure constraints.

Following board-level discussions, 61% of respondents reported that school leaders and staff have taken practical action on environmental sustainability which is consistent with last year's findings. While this indicates a stable level of engagement, it also suggests that progress may be plateauing.

“ We have a lead Trustee and a strategic plan around Climate Action Planning – it's mentioned in the SIP [school improvement plan]. ”

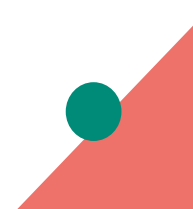


61% of respondents reported that school leaders and staff have taken practical action on environmental sustainability

Although schools appear to be making meaningful progress toward environmental sustainability, achieving further advancements may be increasingly difficult. A combination of pressures, including the rising cost of living, issues with building infrastructure, and escalating energy expenses, can lead governing boards to focus on short-term financial demands at the expense of longer-term environmental objectives.

“ I have been trying to encourage the board and nursery to take action and follow DfE guidance to develop a climate action plan and map out what we already do, but there has been no interest and it keeps being pushed out of the agenda. ”

In addition, the survey findings underscore a wider need for the education sector to foster a more unified and sustained commitment to environmental sustainability. Without support, adequate investment, and clear strategic direction, many schools risk remaining limited to one-off or small-scale efforts, rather than fully integrating sustainability into their everyday practices and long-term planning.



“We will consider joining a MAT if we can find one that aligns with our values.”



School structures and accountability

Governing in a MAT

Over half (60%) of local governors feel that communication between the local tier and the trust board is effective and well managed, this is a reversal of the slight upward trend demonstrated in the last few years. This stagnation in positive perceptions shows that while overall there are more positive attitudes than negative between the tiers of MAT governance, there is still work to be done to ensure those governing locally remain engaged and on board.

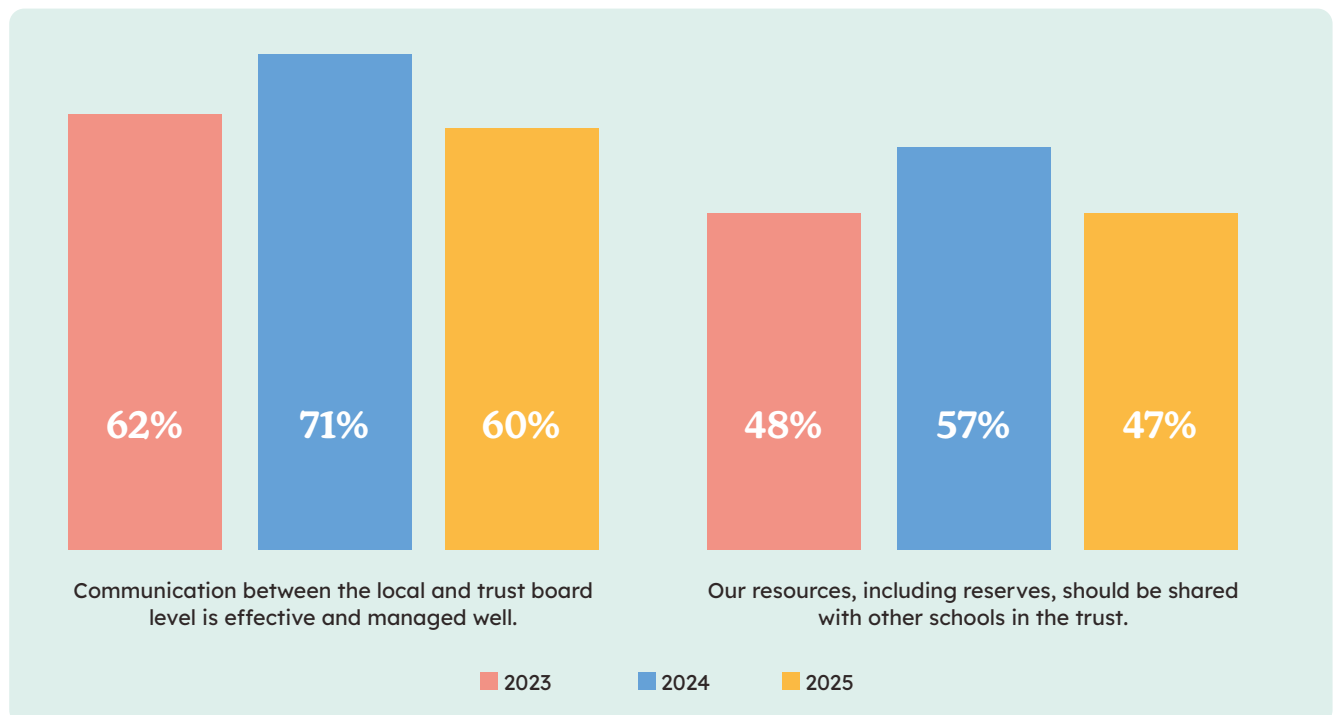
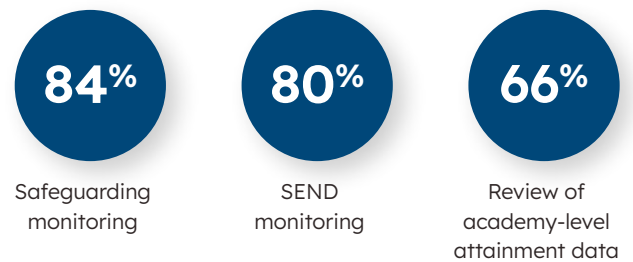
This year's survey also asked MAT trustees for their opinions on communication and found that trustees felt ten percentage points more positive than local governors (65% versus 55%).

Local governors were also asked if they believe that their school's resources, including reserves, should be shared with other schools in the trust, with 47% agreeing or strongly agreeing with this. This shows a dip compared to last year and a return to figures seen in previous years.

The local tier: delegated functions

The local tier in a MAT forms the bridge between the trust board and its schools. It is no longer an abstract concept, but a lived, tested, and embedded reality for most MATs. Through delegation of the 4Ss (Safeguarding, SEND, Standards, and Stakeholders), along with other trust-determined responsibilities, academy committees play a vital role in ensuring that school-level performance is scrutinised and that community voice is represented. Whilst accountability ultimately lies with the trust board, the local tier adds real value by ensuring that local needs are reflected in decision-making.

Top delegated responsibilities:



This year, however, survey results indicate a notable reduction in the functions delegated to the local tier, potentially signaling a shift in governance priorities or trust board strategy.

Sharpest declines in delegated functions:



The survey also highlights a degree of disparity between trustees and local governors in how delegation is perceived, with local governors reporting higher levels of delegation to the local tier. This is seen most prominently in relation to who takes responsibility for recruiting local governors.

Local governor responses	Trustee responses
Recruit most of their own members 76%	Recruit most of their own members 66%
Review the outcomes of stakeholder surveys 57%	Review the outcomes of stakeholder surveys 54%
Have some involvement in the headteacher's annual appraisal 60%	Have some involvement in the headteacher's annual appraisal 58%
Monitor academy budgets 38%	Monitor academy budgets 32%

What responsibilities are delegated to the local tier in your trust?

These findings may reflect a gradual shift toward more centralised decision-making within MATs. This could be a response to evolving governance models, increased accountability requirements, or a desire to streamline processes and improve consistency. At the same time, reduced delegation may have implications for local engagement and the perceived value of local governance.

As this is the first year a reduction has been recorded, it will be important to monitor whether this signals the start of a longer-term trend or simply a short-term response to specific circumstances.

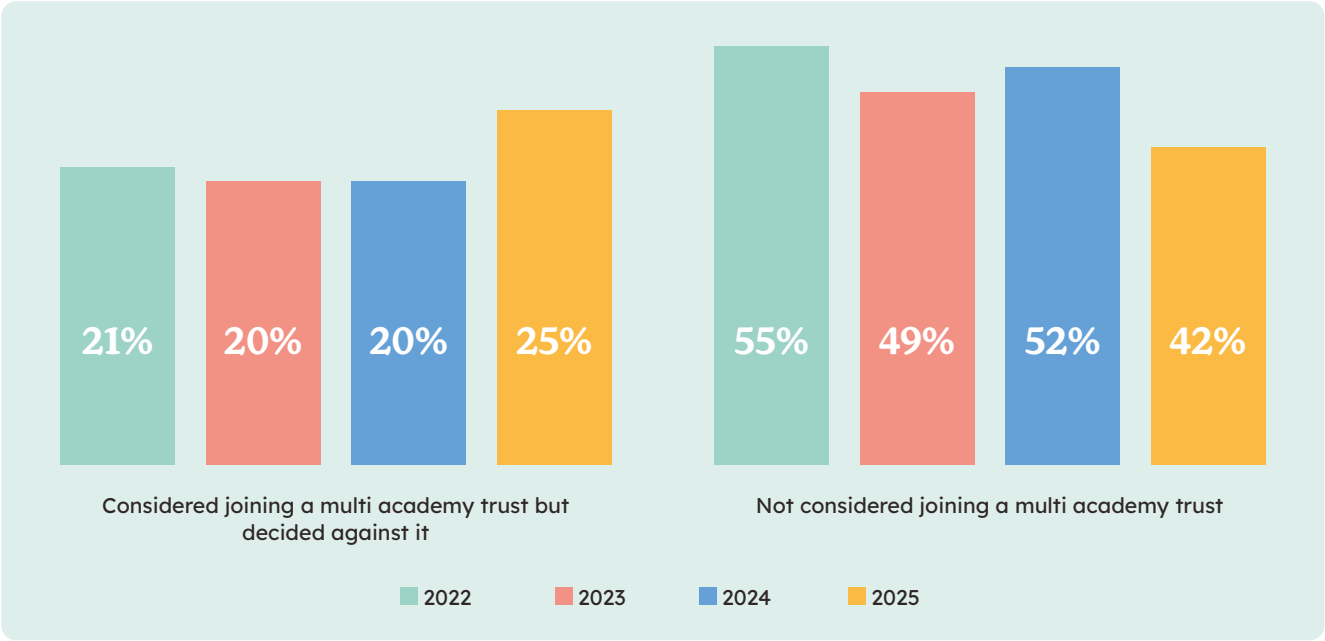
Academisation

Engagement with the MAT landscape is at its highest recorded level, with just 42% of respondents stating they had not considered joining a MAT in the past 12 months – the lowest figure since tracking began. However, increased consideration has not translated into action. A quarter (25%) of respondents reported having considered joining but ultimately decided not to proceed, while only 15% plan to join a MAT in the near future. A further 13% remain unsure. These findings suggest that while MATs are firmly on the radar for many schools, decisions to convert are being made with increasing caution and discernment.

“ We want to retain our autonomy and culture. ”

Attitudes towards joining a MAT vary between maintained schools and SATs. A smaller proportion of SAT respondents said they haven't considered joining a MAT (38% compared to 42% of maintained school respondents), and a slightly higher proportion have explored the option but ultimately decided not to proceed (32% vs 29%). Interestingly, maintained schools are more likely to report plans to join a MAT in the near future (16% vs 12%), while a greater proportion of SATs remain unsure about their next steps (18% vs 13%).

“ We want to stay as a maintained school for as long as possible. ”



MAT inspection

School improvement and accountability remain a central focus for the government's education plans – but what should this look like for MAT inspections? We asked governors and trustees which areas they think would be most important for understanding MAT performance:



Areas like trust-wide policies (38%), trust board decision making (40%), and centralised services (35%) are seen as relatively less critical, though still significant.

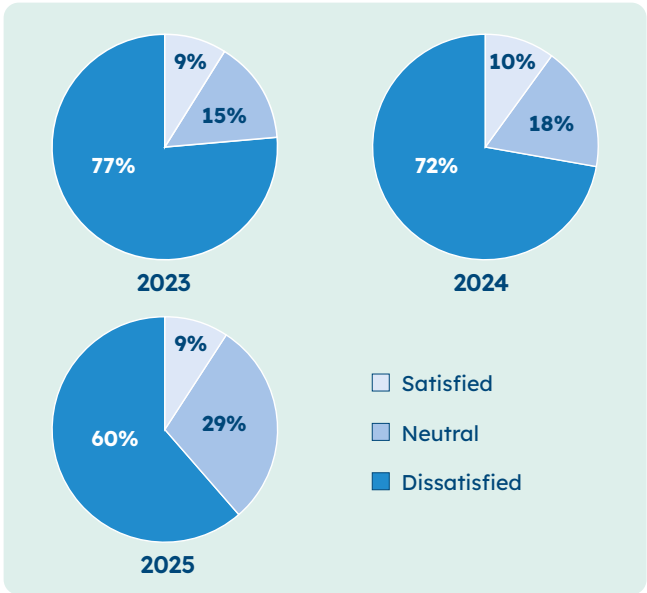
Government performance

The data shows a shift in public opinion regarding government performance between 2023 and 2025. The most significant change is the increase in neutral responses, which rose from 15% in 2023 to 18% in 2024 and reached 29% in 2025.

“ Too soon to say. ”

“ Not noticed any difference yet. ”

This trend indicates that a growing portion of governors and trustees neither approves nor disapproves of the government's performance. At the same time, the percentage of respondents who were very dissatisfied decreased markedly, from 44% in 2023 to 23% in 2025. Although overall dissatisfaction remains high, with 37% identifying as dissatisfied in 2025, the drop in strong negative sentiment appears to be contributing to the rise in neutrality. Satisfaction levels have remained stable across the three years, with 7% of respondents reporting being satisfied and a consistently low percentage, between 2 and 3%, reporting being very satisfied.

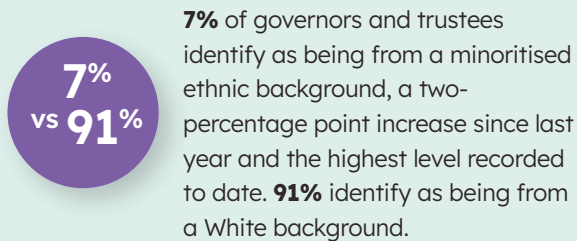


**“We are a strong
and diverse
governing body.”**

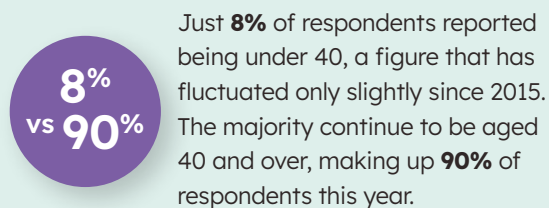


Board practice and development

Governance demographics



This rise is largely driven by younger age groups, with **28%** of those aged 18 to 29 identifying as being from a minoritised ethnic background – a figure that steadily decreases with age, falling to just **3%** among those aged 70 and over.



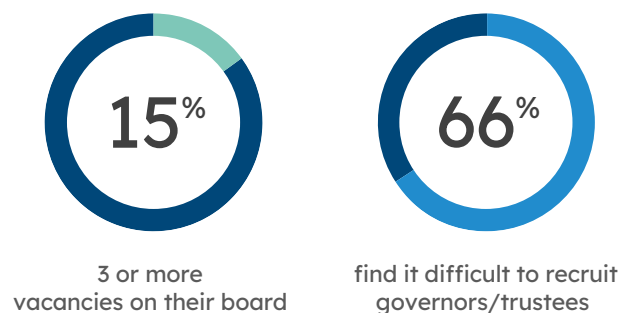
Although there has been a modest improvement in the ethnic diversity of volunteers, the survey reveals a continuing concern about the overall lack of diversity on governing boards, raising questions about the sustainability of the workforce. Greater diversity is needed to ensure boards reflect their school and trust communities, as well as to support efforts to attract more volunteers and ease the burden on those already serving.

Recruitment and retention

Two thirds (66%) of respondents agreed with the statement: “We find it difficult to recruit governors/trustees to the governing board.” Of these, 27% strongly agreed and 39% somewhat agreed. This isn’t a new problem, but its persistence speaks to deeper systemic issues that boards face when trying to attract and retain committed volunteers.

Looking beneath the headline figures, it’s clear that vacancies are the norm, not the exception. Just 30% of boards reported having no current vacancies. A quarter

had one vacancy, and another 24% had two. That means that the vast majority of boards are operating below full capacity, and in governance, that matters. Every missing member is a missing perspective, a heavier workload for those who remain, and a potential gap in challenge, support, or expertise.



“It’s difficult to find new governors who are prepared to commit to the role.”

“It is getting people with the skills, availability and an understanding of the role that is the issue.”

Some phases are feeling the squeeze more acutely than others. While secondary and special school boards were most likely to report no vacancies (35%), nursery and all-through settings had the lowest proportions (26% and 23% respectively). AP boards were most likely to report having one vacancy (34%), hinting at the particular pressures facing these small but crucial sectors.

There’s also a pattern when it comes to governance practice. Boards that had recently undertaken a governance review, especially an external one, were more likely to be full. For example, 37% of those who had an external review reported no vacancies, compared to just 25% of boards where reviews had not been discussed. This reinforces the idea that regular self-reflection and review can help boards identify gaps early, clarify roles, and become more intentional about recruitment.



37% of those who had an external review reported no vacancies, compared to just **25%** of boards where reviews had not been discussed

These numbers also correlate with the impact boards feel they have. The proportion of respondents who strongly agree that their board has made a positive impact steadily declines, from 58% among boards with no vacancies to just 26% among those with five or more vacancies.

While there is great resilience and adaptability demonstrated throughout this year's findings, there is a point where the cracks begin to show, highlighting the need for proactive succession planning, clear recruitment pipelines, and a focus on sustaining not just numbers, but team dynamics and morale. The fact that so many boards continue to function in the face of vacancies is a testament to their commitment, but it shouldn't be the expectation. Boards should be resourced to thrive, not just survive.

While most governors and trustees don't plan on leaving their post, the data also reveals warning signs around sustainability. Around 26% agreed with the statement "I'm considering resigning from my governance role". Of these, 9% strongly agreed and 17% somewhat agreed. An additional 15% expressed 'no view', which may indicate ambivalence or a degree of uncertainty.

This finding deserves serious reflection. While it is encouraging that nearly three-quarters of respondents are not currently considering resignation, the proportion who are cannot be ignored. Viewed in light of the vacancy and recruitment data, the sense of a governance system under pressure becomes clearer. With over 60% of boards reporting at least one vacancy and evidence showing that boards with higher vacancy levels are significantly less likely to feel they are making a strong impact, the picture that emerges is one of boards that are deeply committed but increasingly stretched.

Governing well

Each year, thousands of volunteers give their time, energy and expertise to governing schools and trusts – but what do they believe makes governance effective?

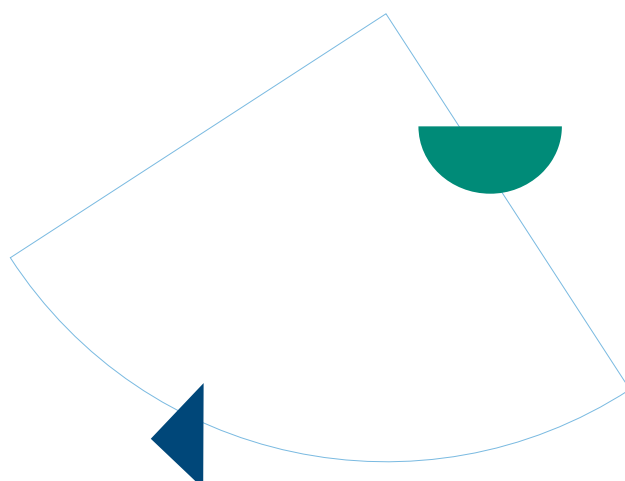
Respondents were asked to identify the skills, knowledge and board practices that they feel are most important to governing well:

Skills and knowledge

Strategic planning and vision setting	58%
Financial oversight and budgeting	48%
Ability to challenge and hold to account	42%
Safeguarding and child protection	40%
School performance monitoring and evaluation	36%

Board practices and mechanisms

Ongoing training and development	48%
School monitoring visits	48%
Appropriate committee structure and terms of reference	42%
Governance professional support and advice	41%
An induction programme for new board members	36%



These responses offer a clear view of what governors and trustees believe helps them to govern well. For many, this means having a clear sense of direction, the ability to scrutinise and support effectively, and an understanding of the school or trust's performance and priorities. But it's also about the conditions that make this work possible, from access to professional advice to regular opportunities for training and reflection. It's not just about individual capability, but about ensuring boards are equipped to meet the demands of the role.

“ My work has provided some training and development for governors in the past, and maintains a network of governors who I can ask for advice. ”

“ I have attended much training over my Governance career. However, due to lack of funds our new Governors have had to access free training backed up with discussions with myself as an experienced Governor. ”

Just under half of boards carried out some form of governance review in the past 12 months. 23% used NGA's 20/21 questions, 17% used another internal method of self-evaluation and 9% undertook an externally facilitated review. 11% had completed a review the previous year and another 11% plan to carry one out in the coming year. A notable proportion of boards either have not discussed a review at all (14%) or are unsure whether one has taken place (15%). These findings are broadly in line with previous years and suggest that while awareness of the importance of governance review remains steady, consistent implementation across all boards is still a challenge.

Governance reviews

While many boards engage in governance review activity, there is still significant variation in how widely and regularly this is carried out.

49%

of boards have carried out a governance review in the past 12 months





Conclusion

Each year, NGA's Annual Governance Survey offers a unique window into the views and experiences of school and trust governing boards. It enables us to reflect on where governors and trustees are making the greatest impact, where they need more support, and what the wider education landscape looks like through their eyes. This year's findings confirm once again the commitment, insight and influence that those governing bring to the table. But they also highlight ongoing tensions in the system and the urgent need to ensure that boards are resourced and empowered to continue fulfilling their core purpose: improving outcomes for children and young people.

The data captured in this report was collected before the Chancellor's June spending review, which included welcome announcements of increased funding for schools and an expansion of free school meal eligibility. These policy decisions represent a long-overdue recognition of pressures that boards have been raising for some time – from the unsustainable strain on school and trust budgets to the moral and practical imperative of ensuring every child can access a nutritious meal each day. While the impact of these new measures is yet to be fully realised, they will undoubtedly shift some of the context in which boards are operating, particularly in terms of financial planning and support for pupils who need it most.

Nevertheless, our findings remain a vital benchmark of the system's condition at the point of data collection. They reflect a sector under immense strain, but also one still striving to innovate, collaborate, and advocate for the best interests of pupils. Boards are contending with increasingly complex challenges: workforce shortages, a broken SEND system, stretched budgets, and rising pupil need. These are not new issues, but the weight of them continues to build, and governing boards continue to shoulder that weight with integrity and diligence.

At its best, governance is not performative or limited to compliance – it's driven by values and purpose. It's responsive to context. It's rooted in the lived experiences of the school community. This year's survey reminds us what this looks like in practice: boards working in partnership with leaders, staying focused on long-term vision, and pushing for better – even when the odds are stacked high.

Still, we cannot rely on goodwill alone. Addressing governance recruitment challenges requires a strategic, sector-wide response. That means improving the visibility of governance, demystifying the role, removing barriers to entry, and investing in inclusive recruitment practices. It also means asking why people step forward and why they sometimes step away.

Thank you

To everyone who took part in this year's survey – thank you. Your insights help us tell the story of governance with honesty and clarity, and they help us shape the future. They underpin the evidence we use to advocate on your behalf and influence the decisions that shape the system you work so hard to support. We will use these findings to press for the reforms, recognition and investment governance deserves, so that it remains not only a cornerstone of the education system, but one that is fair, inclusive, and built to last.

Methodology

The annual governance survey (AGS) is an annual self-selecting online survey that has been conducted by NGA for fifteen consecutive years. It provides a comprehensive overview of school and trust governance, involving governors, trustees, and academy committee members (local governors) from state-funded schools in England. The survey was disseminated predominantly through NGA's channels. Respondents do not need to be members of NGA, but 85% reported that they are.

This year, the survey was conducted from 2 April to 2 June 2025 and over 3,000 people engaged. The total number of responses varies across the survey according to question requirements and/or target subgroups. The survey was hosted and analysed on the Smart Survey platform. Data analysis identified trends and variations based on region, school type, phase, and other respondent demographics.

Governing board type	% of respondents	% of state schools in England
Local authority maintained	52%	47%
Single academy trust	9%	4%
Multi academy trust	18%	49%
Academy committee (local governing body)	21%	49%
Total	100%	100%

School/trust phase	% of respondents
Nursery	11%
Primary (including infant and junior)	71%
Secondary (including those with sixth forms)	26%
All-through	3%
Special	7%
Alternative provision or pupil referral unit	2%
Total	100%

Region	% of respondents
South East	20%
South West	9%
London	9%
East Midlands	11%
West Midlands	9%
North West	20%
North East	6%
East of England	8%
Yorkshire and Humber	9%
Total	100%

Role	% of respondents
Chair	29%
Co-chair	3%
Vice chair	12%
Committee chair	7%
Other governor/trustee	3%
Ex-officio (by virtue of another position) e.g. headteacher	46%
Total	100%

Representativeness

Survey respondents from different school structures are similar to that of state schools in England. Those governing in a local authority maintained school and single academy trusts are slightly overrepresented, meanwhile those governing in MATs are slightly underrepresented.

Terminology

This report uses the following terms to describe school and trust governance structures:

- Ex-officio: A governor or trustee who is on the board due to another role they hold in the school/trust, for example, headteacher or CEO.
- Maintained schools: Schools that receive support and oversight from local authorities including those within federations.
- MATs (multi academy trusts): Governance structures where two or more academies are governed by a single board of trustees.
- SATs (single academy trusts): Governance structures where a single academy operates under its own trust.
- Academy committee (also known as local governing body or similar): The local tier of governance in a MAT. We refer to volunteers serving on academy committees as ‘local governors’.

Survey questions

Certain questions are rotated in and out of the survey depending on the current priorities and developments within the sector. This flexible approach allows us to track certain issues over time, while also making space to explore emerging trends and topical matters in greater depth. This helps keep the survey relevant and manageable for respondents. If you’re interested in questions or themes we’ve explored previously, you can find them in our [2024 report](#).

