



For Schools & Trusts

Outstanding Governance Awards 2025

Celebrating the best
of school and trust
governance

Wednesday 17 September 2025
2pm to 4pm

Terrace Pavilion
House of Commons



For Schools & Trusts

Outstanding Governance Awards 2025

About the awards

Governors, trustees and governance professionals make a substantial contribution to the education of children and young people. These flagship biennial awards celebrate their crucial role and recognise the very best practice in school and trust governance. Our finalists lead the way as exemplars of good governance, whose commitment, leadership and impact have stood out nationally and met the rigorous criteria to reach the final of the Outstanding Governance Awards 2025.

We will recognise achievements in four categories:

- Outstanding clerk to a governing board
- Outstanding lead governance professional
- Outstanding governance in a single school
- Outstanding governance in a multi academy trust

For the first time, we are also proud to introduce the Visible Governance Award, recognising a board, individual or organisation that has raised the profile of governance through public engagement, transparency or innovation.

Share your success using
#NGAawards

Foreword

Those who govern our schools and trusts make an enormous difference – yet their contribution is often unseen. Behind every successful school or trust is a governing board dedicated to shaping brighter futures.

Our bi-annual Outstanding Governance Awards give us the chance to celebrate that dedication and spread the learning from examples of excellent governance far and wide. These awards shine a light on how good governance strengthens schools and trusts, supports staff, and improves the education and wellbeing of children and young people.

Governors and trustees rarely seek recognition. Their focus is always on what matters most – improving outcomes for pupils. But at a time when education faces significant challenges, it is more important than ever to highlight great practice and thank our city-sized community of volunteers. Doing so helps raise awareness of the role, encourages new volunteers, and shows the real difference governance makes.

This year's finalists demonstrate what outstanding governance looks like. They have steered improvement, responded to challenges and introduced new ideas that make a lasting impact, ensuring schools are accountable to the communities they serve. Their stories remind us that governance is not only about preventing problems, it can be a powerful force for positive change and strong, sustainable schools.

We hope all our finalists take pride in their achievements and share them widely. NGA will continue to celebrate your work and champion the vital role of governance across the education sector.

Emma Balchin, Chief Executive, NGA



Strong governance is the foundation of strong schools and trusts. Behind every success story, there are boards and governance professionals making thoughtful, strategic decisions to help pupils, staff, and communities thrive.

The Outstanding Governance Awards give us the chance to celebrate those who go above and beyond in this vital role. Each finalist represents what is possible when commitment, collaboration, and clear vision come together to create meaningful change.

These awards showcase a range of contexts, from single schools to large trusts, and experienced governance professionals to those new to the role, but what they all share is an unwavering focus on what matters most: improving the lives of children and young people.

As Chair of NGA's Board of Trustees, I am immensely proud to recognise and celebrate the passion, expertise, and determination shown by all our finalists. Your work not only strengthens the schools and trusts you serve today but sets the standard for governance in the future.

Thank you for everything you do.

Lawayne Jefferson, Chair of Trustees, NGA



Outstanding clerk to a governing board

This award celebrates the vital role of the professional clerk. Each of our finalists exemplifies outstanding practice in providing administrative support and expert advice, playing a fundamental role in the effectiveness of their governing board. Judges praised their dedication for strengthening governance in their schools and their unwavering commitment to children and young people. NGA was delighted with the high quality of nominations received from boards all over the country, highlighting the integral work of clerks and how indispensable they are to the schools they serve.

Thank you to our category judges, Fiona Collier, Chair, NAGAS and Charlotte Harding, Director of Professional Development, NGA.

Winner

Amy Doody, Frithwood Primary School

Amy is recognised as an outstanding clerk whose extensive knowledge and passion for her role has had a significant impact at her school. Judges were struck by the pivotal role she has played in improving the board's efficiency, implementing an effective committee structure, and ensuring that the board and its committees are focused and effectively carry out their duties.

Amy's ability to build strong relationships has been instrumental in supporting both communication and collaboration across the board, with her work with the co-chairs being particularly commendable, ensuring cohesion at all levels. Judges also heard about Amy's crucial role in the school's recent Ofsted inspection, where she went above and beyond to ensure that the board was fully prepared and supported. With a "can do" attitude and a clear dedication to excellence, Amy's impact is both lasting and deeply valued.

Winner

Cheryl Kuit, Highworth Grammar School

Since 2021, Cheryl's tenacity, strategic thinking and commitment to best practice have fundamentally reshaped governance at her school, transforming a disengaged board into one that is dynamic, diverse and more deeply connected to the school community. Judges heard how Cheryl implemented robust systems for compliance, training and induction, and played a vital role in changing the culture of the board – raising expectations and ensuring that governors are informed, confident and active in their roles.

Her work to strengthen board diversity and representation deserves particular commendation, ensuring that the board is representative of the local community, while also embedding pupil and staff voice. Cheryl's outward facing approach and exemplary professionalism have built strong external partnerships and created opportunities for shared learning across local schools.

Highly commended

Lena Seed, The Norton Knatchbull School

Described as someone who "speaks truth to power", Lena holds strong, trusted relationships with the headteacher and chair, providing effective challenge and guidance where needed. Her leadership has been pivotal in reshaping the board's identity, gaining recognition in Ofsted, and enhancing the board's overall strategic capacity. Judges were particularly impressed by Lena's proactive and reflective approach – supporting, challenging and developing the board to ensure it operates with purpose and confidence.

She has played a key role in shifting the culture of governance from compliance-focused to strategic and outward-looking, embedding stakeholder voice and broadening representation on the board. Lena's work to ensure that all governors are engaged through 1:1s, tailored training, regular updates and AI supported tools, has had a tangible impact, particularly in building governor confidence and sharpening strategic questioning. Lena's work is innovative, inclusive and deeply impactful, demonstrating outstanding practice in the role.

Visible Governance Award

Celebrating individuals, boards or organisations that have gone above and beyond to champion and showcase the importance of school and trust governance this award recognises exceptional efforts to raise the profile of governance across the education sector and in the wider public, making it more visible, valued, and effective.

Winner

Learn Sheffield

A sector-led school improvement partnership dedicated to raising the profile and impact of governance across the city, Learn Sheffield's work has transformed governance from a formality into a strategic force for driving school improvement and positive outcomes for children and young people across the city. At the heart of this has been their School Governance Improvement Service (SGIS), which offers tailored support for governing boards and ensures they have access to the latest guidance and best practices in governance. This is delivered seamlessly in collaboration with their improvement partners, creating a strong support network for school and trust development. They have received praise from leaders for their high quality, credibility and flexibility.

In addition to the SGIS, its comprehensive governance training offer reflects a deep commitment to the continuous development of governors and trustees. With offers for those that are both new to and experienced in governance, Learn Sheffield provides regular briefings, trainings and conferences, as well as access to NGA's Learning Link, that are aligned with the evolving needs of governance in the city.

A key initiative in its efforts, the Governance Engagement Project, delivered in partnership with the Sheffield Association of School Governing Bodies and Sheffield City Council, exemplifies its commitment to widening participation and improving diversity in governance. City-wide campaigns, including an exceptional promotional video, raise awareness of the crucial role of governors and trustees with the aim of building a sustainable pipeline of volunteers.

Through these initiatives, Learn Sheffield's commitment to equipping governors and trustees with the knowledge, skills and confidence to be highly effective in their roles, and their efforts to support local schools and trusts with improvement, have profoundly transformed the landscape of school governance in Sheffield. They have championed a culture where governance is not simply a formality, but a powerful, strategic force that can drive school improvement and create positive outcomes for children and young people.



Outstanding lead governance professional

This category recognises the work of lead governance professionals who have proven themselves to be exceptional leaders and role models in their field. These highly skilled practitioners not only have a positive impact on governance compliance, efficiency, and effectiveness, but also lead and inspire governance teams or services with vision and integrity. Overall, the nominees have shown themselves to be value-driven individuals who, through their excellent leadership, have helped to “hard wire” a culture of effective and ethical governance in the organisations they support.

Thank you to our category judges, Peter Swabey, Policy & Research Director, CGI and Amy Wright, Clerking Development Manager, NGA.

Winner

Sarah Lay, Co-op Academies Trust

Sarah displays assuredness, knowledge and a comprehensive understanding of governance. As head of the governance team within the trust, she has played an instrumental role in establishing a diverse team of clerks and ensuring that the role of clerk has professional recognition within the trust. Her manager stated, “her efforts have not only elevated the governance framework but also fostered a more inclusive, equitable and diverse environment at every level of governance.”

Through her research into local governance and her pivotal role guiding the board’s engagement with its Academy Community Councils (ACCs), she helped identify follow-up actions and key questions related to the challenges academies face in supporting pupils with SEND. Her commitment to high standards of governance is evident in her requirement for all local tier governance officers to hold a Level 3 qualification, as well as her own completion of the CGI qualifying programme. Overall, Sarah’s efficiency, effectiveness and commitment to excellent governance left the judges in no doubt that she is an outstanding lead governance professional.

Highly commended

Jill Cameron, Eko Trust

Jill impressed the judges with her thorough understanding of governance and her recognition of the importance of keeping those governing engaged, as well as providing them with a comprehensive induction and training. Her commitment to developing clerking practices in the trust is evidenced by her exploration of technological innovations, such as AI, to enhance efficiency and accuracy. This is also evident in her proactive approach to professional development, demonstrated by undertaking a clerking qualification, attending webinars, masterclasses, briefings, and regularly reviewing bulletins from governance organisations to stay updated on governance developments.

The CEO stated “Jill’s dedication, innovative approach, and unwavering commitment have had a profound and lasting positive impact on governance effectiveness throughout the Eko Trust. Her leadership ensures that governance is not merely a compliance exercise but a dynamic and integral part of the trust’s strategic direction and operational effectiveness.”

Finalist

Andrea Richards, Thomas Deacon Education Trust

Having been at the trust for just over a year, Andrea’s leadership has already made a significant impact. She has completed the NGA Leading Governance Development for Clerks programme, undertaken a thorough review of the trust’s governance structure, introduced training and templates for notetaking at meetings, and developed a governance recruitment process. Her efforts have strengthened governance practices, aligned them with sector best practice, and improved consistency across the trust. She is highly regarded for creating a safe, supportive environment where academy administrators feel comfortable raising concerns about their roles. Her approachable and dependable nature, combined with her expertise, has positioned her as a trusted advisor. Through her proactive and people centred approach, she has enhanced both the culture and effectiveness of governance at every level of the trust.

Finalist

Jackie Nicholls, Saint John Southworth Catholic Academy Trust

Jackie demonstrates a deep understanding of the complexity and importance of local governance, recognising that effective stakeholder engagement is central to the trust board's success. Praised by the chair of trustees as an integral member of the central team, she has been instrumental in shaping governance frameworks, guiding discussions on the scheme of delegation, and advising on academisation, regulation, and compliance.

She has authored clear, practical governance guides for the trust, including role descriptions that support clarity and consistency across all levels of governance. Her comprehensive induction process ensures those governing are well prepared, with personalised training offered where needed. Through her work, Jackie actively fosters a culture of continuous professional development aligning organisational priorities with the individual growth of governance professionals and those governing in the trust.

Finalist

Ruth Bradbury, Manchester City Council

Ruth actively supports schools in succession planning for chairs, ensuring strong, sustainable leadership for the future. She has also taken a leading role in encouraging and mentoring colleagues from Manchester City Council to become school governors, helping to strengthen vital connections between the council and the schools and communities it serves. Ruth's line manager, Vickie, praises her expertise as instrumental in strengthening school leadership across the city through strategic models of support.

Known for her exceptional knowledge of governance legislation, she is a trusted expert, frequently called upon to navigate complex governance challenges. Where appropriate, she also supports schools by leading governance reviews through NGA and has developed a highly effective model of support and challenge, contributing to the development of stronger governing boards. Ruth has also upskilled to become webmaster, developing the new school website for the city.



Support your governance

Expert governance support tailored to your board's success – from strategic planning and executive appraisal to independent reviews and complaint investigations. Delivered by NGA's team of 44 trusted consultants across England, our practical consultancy helps boards lead with clarity and confidence.



Our core services

External Reviews of Governance

A full diagnostic review to assess governance effectiveness to drive improvement and impact.

Includes:

- Independent analysis and a detailed report
- Development workshop
- Follow-up and 3-month NGA Gold Advice access

Independent Review Panel support

End-to-end IRP services with trained governance expertise, ensuring fair, compliant decision-making.

Includes:

- Panel role support (chair, clerk, member)
- Admin and process guidance
- Post-panel advice

nga.org.uk/consultancy

Find out more



Discounts
for NGA
members

Outstanding governance in a single school

This award recognises outstanding governing boards of single state-funded schools in England, including both maintained schools and single academy trusts. Our finalists each demonstrate how exceptional strategic leadership, effective support and challenge to school leaders, and a commitment to continuous improvement enable them to go beyond the basics of their role, making a lasting, significant impact on the schools, pupils, and communities they serve. Facing a range of circumstances and challenges, they all display dedication to making the right decisions in the best interests of their pupils. Through their outstanding governance, they set a benchmark for effective governance across schools in England, consistently fulfilling their core responsibilities while going above and beyond to drive positive change and raise standards.

Thank you to our category judges Lawayne Jefferson, Chair of Trustees, NGA and Emma Balchin, Chief Executive, NGA.

Winner

Benton Dene Primary School

Taking a strategic, inclusive and forward-thinking approach, with clear alignment to the school's vision and values, judges were impressed by how the board routinely uses evidence-based practice, self-evaluation and strong stakeholder engagement to fulfil its functions effectively. The board holds leaders to account through structured discussions, robust use of data, and a clear focus on pupil outcomes, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and pupils with SEND. Despite budget pressures, financial oversight is strong, with governors identifying savings, securing grants and using benchmarking to inform decisions.

The board's commendable inclusive ethos is evident in high extra-curricular uptake, targeted pupil premium support and projects like the school's uniform hub and walk-to-school initiative, which gained national attention.

The board maintains high visibility, engaging pupils, parents and staff through surveys, visits and feedback loops. They use methods such as SWOT analysis to enhance effectiveness, while also taking advantage of annual self-evaluation, skills audits and tailored training to ensure the board remains impactful.

Being collaborative, outward-facing, and values-driven, this board demonstrates excellence across all aspects of governance, ensuring high standards, improving outcomes and embedding a strong, inclusive culture throughout the school community.

Highly commended

Katherine Warrington School

Despite being a relatively new school, this board demonstrates mature governance, with structured reviews of practice, robust financial oversight, values-led governance and a commitment to continuous improvement. The board has developed a strong identity, prioritising educational excellence alongside wellbeing, inclusion, and innovation.

Judges were impressed by the trustees' proactive role in shaping strategy, holding leaders to account through informed challenge, triangulation of evidence, and a visible presence across the school. Judges also heard about the school's forward-looking approach to sustainability, expanding solar provision, promoting community use of facilities and benchmarking spending.

A clear focus on inclusion also runs throughout their work, with pupil, parent and staff voice informing decisions. They engage meaningfully through equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) forums, surveys, and events, while also being reflective about representation at board level. The board supports a culture of transparency and learning, using NGA tools, skills audits, and training to build capacity.

They model openness, build bridges with the wider community, and collaborate with local schools. Their governance is principled, ambitious, and self-aware, demonstrating clear impact in a rapidly growing and increasingly successful school.



Highly Commended

Snaith Primary School

This board is an outstanding example of proactive and inclusive governance. Through regular reviews of progress and data analysis, it ensures that the school's vision is continually aligned with the evolving needs of pupils, staff, and parents. The board constructively holds the headteacher to account through robust governance practices, including regular meetings, triangulation, and monitoring visits, ensuring that decisions have a clear, positive impact.

With a strong focus on safeguarding and inclusivity, the board has addressed the rising needs of vulnerable pupil groups. Financial oversight is also a key strength, with the board ensuring a balanced budget, focusing on resource allocation, and making strategic investments in technology to support learning.

The board engages admirably with stakeholders, fostering transparency and building strong relationships. Judges were impressed by their commitment to continuous board development, conducting annual skills audits, engaging in training meetings, and governors sharing training they attend.

Wanting every pupil to shine, the board's decision making and clear communication ensure that school policies and actions are impactful and focused on securing the best outcomes for every pupil. The board's governance was highly commended by Ofsted, with 100% of responding parents recommending the school.

Chief Executive's Award

Tealby School

Tealby's story is an inspiring one of overcoming the odds in the face of unique difficulty. Judges were struck with how the school has innovatively addressed challenges specific to a school of its size, such as estate issues with having a listed building and limited space.

Recognising the need for long-term sustainability, the board's innovative approach to finances has been central to its strategy, making effective use of benchmarking and collaborating with local schools to share information and procurement. This has enabled the school to maintain a balanced budget despite local funding pressures.

The board has also worked hard to hold the headteacher to account, underpinned by regular monitoring visits, engaging with stakeholders, and termly reports, taking an approach that balances staff wellbeing with performance expectations, all while being mindful of the unique challenges the school faces. The board also ensures that it carries out regular self-evaluation, through peer review, paired monitoring visits, annual skills audits and mid-year reviews for each governor, ensuring that all board members are engaged and supported.

With a steadfast commitment to serving both their pupils and the local community, the board actively engages with parents, staff, pupils and the wider community through events, feedback sessions, and open communication, creating a sense of shared ownership of the school's success.

Since 2020, when the school only had three governors, governance has matured significantly, turning the school into a model of success for others, demonstrating that with community collaboration and innovative governance, even the smallest schools can thrive and have a lasting impact on their pupils.



Outstanding governance in a Multi Academy Trust

The finalists in this category demonstrated exemplary governance practices within a Multi Academy Trust, underpinned by strong leadership, a clear and compelling vision, and effective strategic oversight. These strengths are consistently embedded across all levels of governance, providing a clear and practical model of what effective central and local governance looks like in action.

Thank you to our category judges Michael Barton, Head of Advocacy and External Affairs, NGA and Sam Henson, Deputy Chief Executive, NGA.

Winner

East Midlands Academy Trust (EMAT)

Tasked with reshaping the trust after a challenging period, EMAT has successfully evolved into an organisation defined by strong collaboration, robust governance, and deeply embedded values. Judges were impressed by the clarity and purpose of EMAT's vision, described by the CEO and chair of trustees as being rooted in deep social responsibility towards pupils.

This is reflected in the trust's inclusive ethos, with a higher-than-average proportion of pupils with SEND and strategic reinvestment into school improvements through careful budget management. EMAT's federated Local Governing Bodies (LGBs) exemplify an effective hub model, enabling benchmarking, shared learning, and localised focus.

Clear lines of separation between the central and local tiers are maintained, while regular school visits from the chair, along with strong communication, ensure close and continuous contact with the local level.

Governance is seen as integral to leadership, supported by a skilled lead governance professional who ensures compliance and cohesion across the trust. Streamlined reporting and purposeful delegation ensure no one works in isolation. Overall, EMAT exemplifies governance collaboration at its best, ensuring that a strong social vision is embedded and implemented throughout the trust.

Highly commended

Exceed Learning Partnership

Proud of its deeply rooted connection to Doncaster's community and serving some of the most deprived areas nationally, Exceed Learning Partnership's local context drives the trust's mission and values. Its growth has been steady and intentional, underpinned by a strong commitment to equity, high standards, and governance as a central pillar of improvement.

The founding ethos continues to shape its strategic direction, with a clear culture that puts pupils at the heart of every decision. Judges highlighted the impressive partnership between the CEO and chair of trustees, who bring complementary experience and deep contextual understanding.

A key strength lies in the trust's clear grasp of the strategic-operational divide across finance, staffing, and standards, ensuring all decisions are aligned with its overall strategy. Governance at the local level is well-defined and strategically supported, while flexibility importantly allows its Local Academy Committees (LACs) to reflect local contexts.

The lead governance professional ensures coherence across all tiers and proactively drives development. The trust's values are not just stated, they are lived and delivered through purposeful collaboration between trust leaders and those governing at all levels, ensuring continuous, pupil-centred improvement.

Finalist

Accord Multi Academy Trust

Accord Multi Academy Trust demonstrates a governance culture grounded in professionalism, transparency and inclusive collaboration. The CEO views governance as central to the trust's vision, describing members as 'guardians of governance' who prioritise open communication. The relationship between the CEO and chair is built on mutual respect and constructive challenge. Together, they shaped a vision grounded in collaboration, inclusion and community belonging, with a strong culture of accountability that makes holding to account a natural part of leadership. Governance is further supported by a long serving governance professional who manages compliance, board operations, and feedback systems who played a key role in restructuring the board, in line with best practice and reinforcing effective governance.

At the local level, LGB chairs value the structured forums for data review, as well as informal networking and tailored training opportunities. They are empowered to challenge, represent their local community and maintain school identity within a MAT framework. Accord MAT demonstrates a mature, reflective governance model where leadership and local engagement work in harmony to support pupils, staff, and communities.

Finalist

Endeavour Learning Trust

Endeavour Learning Trust has undergone significant transformation since the appointment of a new CEO in 2023. The trust's vision, driven by trustees and centred on the principle of 'belonging rather than inclusion', is collectively owned and actively shared across the organisation. The CEO and chair work collaboratively to guide the trust, ensuring a balance between strategic direction and operational realities.

Governance is dynamic, with the lead governance professional ensuring policies are regularly updated in response to emerging challenges. Community is the key strategic priority, with local academy committees operating under a clear scheme of delegation to ensure central plans are effectively implemented at school level, while a strong emphasis is placed on governance conferences and tailored inductions and training to ensure that local committees are well supported.

Overall, judges were impressed by the trust's notably strong stakeholder engagement, clearly demonstrated by its unified response to the Southport stabbings, where the entire trust rallied to support a school that was directly affected through coordinated fundraising efforts.

Finalist

Nexus Multi Academy Trust

Currently undergoing a merger, Nexus Multi Academy Trust is set to expand from 17 to 50 schools. It remains a predominantly special school trust with a strong focus on civic leadership and public sector values.

Governance is central to the trust's strategic vision, which has evolved to balance oversight with autonomy. The trust's governance professional plays a key role in compliance, risk management and the development of the trust's scheme of delegation, while the CEO and chair share a strong working relationship, built on trust and mutual respect.

Trust-wide initiatives are evaluated through a variety of evidence, including family feedback, complaints, external audits, and close partnerships with local authorities. Local governance plays a vital role within the trust, with the CEO describing its local committees as the "guardians of ethos and community."

Having restructured its local committees into Academy Councils which focus on culture, values and community voice, with specialist-led school performance scrutiny boards handling performance oversight, local chairs have noted that school level governance still feels meaningful, reflecting positively on communication and stakeholder engagement.

Executive appraisal support

Your executive leader shapes your organisation's future.

Reviewing executive leadership performance is one of a board's most important responsibilities. Our expert consultants make the process seamless, objective and insightful.

Our expert consultant supports the appraisal process, ensuring, strategic alignment and providing an objective view of leadership and performance.

Our consultancy includes:

- Reviewing the executive's impact in the role
- Guidance on aligning new objectives to organisational strategy
- Advice to ensure SMART targets are set
- Consideration of executive wellbeing, workload and career aspirations
- Support throughout the process, with a full written record



Add-on: 360 feedback for executives

NEW from
September
2025

This add-on captures feedback from across the organisation, offering a clearer view of executive performance, strengths, and growth opportunities.

nga.org.uk/executive-appraisal-support

Find
out
more

