

16th June 2017

Dear Secretary of State,

Congratulations on your reappointment as Secretary of State. We look forward to continuing to work with you. Since we met, the Charity Commission has agreed to our name changing to the National Governance Association; our members agreed to this in order to recognise the role of trustees and clerks.

We discussed our concerns over the levels of school funding and in February we wrote jointly with NAHT the attached letter to the Chancellor. Unfortunately we did not receive a reply, and I want to take this opportunity to draw your attention again to its contents. Funding remains the top concern for most of our members across England and we wish to continue this discussion with your Department as a matter of urgency.

We have worked alongside your officials in the development of the Department's Governance Handbook, which we believe is a useful resource and has helped focus the work of boards. However our extensive contact with governing boards has led us to have concerns that the three core functions do not encapsulate that part of governance which is about ensuring voices of other stakeholders are heard and taken account of. We therefore suggest this should be formally adopted as a fourth function to ensure that it is recognised as a fundamental component of governance and that it actually happens.

There is a particular risk that as MATs grow, trustees lose connections with local communities, parents, pupils and academy staff. The formation of MATs from single schools has created a transfer of power and autonomy away from individual school governing bodies to boards of MAT trustees, which are often small in number. This is a fundamental change in school governance which, despite our best efforts, has not been widely discussed and, as made clear by the House of Commons Education Committee, is not even well understood. We need to be transparent and honest about the risks associated with these models, while at the same time acknowledging the advantages that groups of schools can bring.

We suggest that it is time to debate seriously the legitimacy of new models of school governance and ensure that there is not a growing divide between those who have the power and are making the decisions about the use of public funding and those in local communities who can feel powerless and ignored.

NGA has a proposal about the broadening of the membership of MATs which we would like your department to adopt. I look forward to discussing this with you.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Knights
Chief Executive