

GOVERNOR HEADLINES

Welcome to issue #34 of Governor Headlines for April 2020.

During these unprecedented times we wanted to maintain our usual contact with you, so have put together some of the key messages for governors and schools into Governor Headlines. These really are challenging times, yet as governors you have managed to work even more flexibly to ensure the wellbeing of your Headteachers, as they work to ensure provision for those pupils that need it in schools; and to continue the learning for those learning at home. We thank all of you for your dedication and support in keeping the wheels of governance turning.

As always, if you have any thoughts or suggestions regarding Governor Headlines please contact governorheadlines@suffolk.gov.uk .

CORE GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

COVID-19 – School Governance

IMPORTANCE: NEED TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

We know that governing bodies have been supporting their school leaders respond to the Coronavirus pandemic and that schools are playing a vital and much appreciated part in contributing to the nation's response. Indeed, through school leaders actions, vulnerable children have continued to have a safe place to come on a daily basis; check ins are being carried out using phone and IT ; key workers have been able to continue to work and fulfil their critical roles to support the nation at this time as well as learning carrying on at home for the vast majority of pupils who are able to be safely looked after at home.

Over the next few weeks it will be important that governing boards continue to function, carry out urgent business and make necessary decisions. The National Governance Association (NGA) has said in their [latest guidance](#):

“Whilst we urge governing boards not to allow the COVID-19 issue to create an environment which allows for a lack of care and due diligence, we also recognise that

it could lead to circumstances that make it impossible to make a decision or discharge a function operating strictly by the rules. In such circumstances doing the right thing by schools, pupils, staff and communities should come first. However, there should at the very least be a clear communication and audit trail that explains why it was necessary to take an alternative approach.”

As far as possible governing boards should ensure that all governors/trustees are involved in the decision making and encouraged to play a full part. For urgent decisions this may not always be possible, and arrangements for Chair’s urgent decisions differ between maintained schools and academy trusts. There is further information on this in the NGA guidance linked above, but if you have any queries regarding this do contact Schools’ Choice or ourselves in the Leadership and Governance Team at governance@suffolk.gov.uk or on 01473 263972.

You may already have received notification that the Department for Education (DfE) has published a COVID-19 Governance Update which gives the latest departmental and government advice on the spread of the COVID-19 virus and how this relates to the role of those on governing and trust boards and clerks/governance professionals. The update is available on GOV.UK [here](#).

We have heard locally of practices in which Headteachers are checking on learning that is taking place. These include checking the use of online learning resources; joining virtual classrooms amongst other creative and effective ways. With this situation likely to go on for some time, do consider what questions you will ask your Headteacher – what are they finding is working well, what is going to continue, what is going to change and any gaps emerging? We will be sharing examples of these practices through our daily communications with schools through Suffolk Headlines.

Schools across the county are putting into place arrangements to ensure all staff have a break, many using rotas which include online teaching time; time in school where appropriate; and leave arrangements. If you would like support in liaising with another school to establish a local collaboration do contact the helpline we have established on 01473 263942.

The Schools’ Choice Virtual Governance model policy can be found [here](#).

Schools Choice have confirmed that they will be reviewing the summer term agendas to ensure they reflect the current priorities of boards, following NGA guidance. The priorities are:

- business critical decisions (e.g. budget and decisions regarding deployment of resources)
- monitoring how schools are continuing to provide care for children who are vulnerable, children with ECHP plans, the children of key workers, associated risks and issues
- any issues arising from how the buildings are currently being used and remote working for staff

- support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home
- monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders.

In discussion with Schools' Choice, we may defer May's edition of The Knowledge if we are still operating on interim measures.

Please do send the Leadership and Governance Team, any questions, comments or emerging new good practice that we can share with your peers.

Suffolk Headlines – Special Editions

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOL

Special editions of Suffolk Headlines are currently being sent out on a frequent basis to all Headteachers in Suffolk. These newsletters contain messages to school leaders from Allan Cadzow, Director for Children and Young People, Suffolk County Council, in which he gives important information and updates on COVID-19.

[You can view recent issues of Suffolk Headlines here.](#)

Leadership Wellbeing Support

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

We recognise that you are all making difficult decisions in a context where advice and guidance is frequently updated. Suffolk school leaders have the absolute backing of the Local Authority and are trusted to act in the best interests of all in making these choices.

We know that there are increasing levels of anxiety amongst communities, and school leaders and school staff are absorbing much of this. Please do continue to check in with your Headteacher to provide support for this. In addition, there is support for Headteachers and other school leaders, including governors through the Headteacher associations.

If you have a concern or a query that you would like support with, are worried about the wellbeing of a Headteacher or other member of staff or would like to voice your

anxiety please talk to us. For initial contact, the phone number is 01473 260163 or the e-mail address is governance@suffolk.gov.uk.

COVID-19 Supporting School Leaders and parents

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOL

Local authority officers are working with schools to implement the government guidelines to maintain critical services.

There is a school facing team who gather and collate information from schools about which are open to enable the Local Authority (LA) to have a county-wide view of places available.

Each school will have been contacted by the LA to gather this information initially, however if your schools' circumstances have since changed please update us [here](#).

A second team take calls from parents of key workers and those of vulnerable children who are unable to find a school place for them.

The phonenumber for this is 01473 263985

There is also a team of officers to help support school leaders' wellbeing. There is a phone number and email address to ensure Headteachers get the support they may need.

Email: leadershipwellbeingsupport@suffolk.gov.uk

Phonenumber: 01473 260163

The Leadership and Governance Team

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

You'll have read above about the new teams that have been created to support schools during the COVID-19 outbreak. However, we also want to assure you that the Leadership and Governance team are still operational and available should you like to contact us.

If you have a query or would like support, whether this be related to the current situation or a more usual aspect of governance, please contact us at 01473 263972 or governance@suffolk.gov.uk .

Updating School Policies

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

As your Governing body settles into a “new normal” and finds a way to carry on its business virtually, there is a great opportunity to review policies due for renewal in the coming two terms. If governors can take the lead on any of these, it could reduce the burden on Headteachers. Getting ahead of the schedule also has the potential to reduce workload in the Autumn Term when we expect that there will be many extraordinary demands on leaders, as schools hopefully return to full capacity.

You can find the example policy tracker [here](#) and contact the Leadership and Governance team at governance@suffolk.gov.uk or 01473 263972 for support and guidance with policies.

We recommend circulating draft documents electronically with tracked changes to speed up the process of review prior to meetings. This can be done via email, or on a shared platform such as GovernorHub. The NGA recommend that meetings still happen but, virtually, using a tool such as Skype, Teams or Zoom. It may also be that there are policies that need a short-term annex to take account of the current situation. For example, The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), The National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) and National Education Union (NEU) Joint Union Advice on Covid 19 suggests that: ‘Schools may want to produce a short annex to their safeguarding policies detailing any changes they have put in place during this period...’

Schools Guidance on Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Suffolk County Council

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOL

Suffolk County Council have a webpage dedicated to keeping school leaders informed during the COVID-19 outbreak. The webpage can be found [here](#) and currently includes a range of information, including on exams, free school meals and health and safety. The webpage will be updated frequently.

OTHER INFORMATION

School Admission Arrangements for 2021/2022

IMPORTANCE: STATUTORY
WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

The admission arrangements to all mainstream schools in Suffolk for the 2021/2022 school year are now on the county council's website [here](#).

Any objections to these arrangements must be made to the Schools Adjudicator by **15 May 2020**. Further information is available on the Schools Adjudicator's website [here](#).

The Admissions Team is prioritising work to meet the national offer day of 16 April 2020 for primary school place offers for September.

If you have any queries or would like further information please contact Jan Scott, , at jan.scott@suffolk.gov.uk or on 01473 264657.

School Budgets

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW
WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

When this year's budgets have been set they can be ratified electronically. You will need to confirm your budget in your final meeting before submitting your ratification.

If you have any queries please send them to the Schools Accountancy Team at sat@suffolk.gov.uk.

Planned Preventative Maintenance for Schools

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW
WHO IT'S FOR: MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Schools have a responsibility to ensure that their premises are safe for users and that statutory health and safety tests are carried out as part of an annual programme. These tests cover water risk assessments, fire alarm and detection systems, boilers, air conditioning systems and lifts.

If schools have not already agreed the timing of statutory tests, they are asked to do so as soon as possible by contacting the school's Property Advisor or the Vertas Helpdesk PropertyManagement@vertas.co.uk.

Further guidance from Vertas on managing school sites which are closed because of Covid-19 can be found [here](#).

If you would like further information please contact Joy Stodart, Head of Schools Infrastructure at joy.stodart@suffolk.gov.uk or 07515190911.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Schools Choice Training

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW
WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

Schools' Choice governor training (both core sessions and in school sessions) have been cancelled until half term, with the exception of safeguarding training sessions. Schools' Choice may still need to cancel the safeguarding sessions, but they are hoping to put in place an online solution as soon as possible. If this proves impossible in the timescale, they will communicate this message.

Schools' Choice are working hard to move all the sessions online and will keep you informed of progress. Once the online sessions are ready, they will still be bookable on GovernorHub. The aim is to put on additional sessions in the second half of the Summer term to replace cancelled sessions.

Furthermore, they are hoping to run a Q&A session in place of the termly briefing at the start of the Summer term and again they will keep you informed of the details.

Please don't forget that in the meantime you still have access to [NGA Learning Link](#).

Governors for Schools – e-Learning Courses

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW
WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

Governors for Schools are running a number of e-Learning courses that you may find useful. Topics covered include Driving School Improvement and Performance Data, as well as a governor induction course for new governors. Courses are free of charge but you will need to register your details as an e-Learning user.

Please click [here](#) for further information.



Have a comment to make?

Contact: qualitymattersineducationandlearning@suffolk.gov.uk
to comment, favourably or otherwise, on any aspect of Suffolk County Council's school improvement strategy.