

GOVERNOR HEADLINES

Welcome to issue #36 of Governor Headlines for June 2020.

Once again, we want to say thank you for your commitment to governance during what has been a challenging few months. It's clear to all of us that the effects of COVID-19 will continue to affect schools for some time, and we will all need to adapt to new ways of working. However, we continue to be impressed and heartened by your dedication to the role. Your continued support for the wellbeing of your Headteachers and other senior leaders, as well as your assistance with risk assessments, has been and continues to be of paramount importance.

You will all be aware that the Department for Education (DfE) have been making regular amendments to their [School Governance Update](#) but we wanted to draw particular attention to this [message from the Secretary of State for Education](#), Gavin Williamson, as his thanks echoes our own. In this message he emphasises the need for trustees and governors to continue to support the wellbeing and capacity of school leaders, acknowledging the immense pressure that they have been working under for some time now.

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

CORE GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

Black Lives Matter Equity in Education

IMPORTANCE: STATUTORY
WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS

You will all have seen the media coverage of the horrific murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council shared her reflections in a message to all SCC members:

“The first thing to say is that although his horrific murder happened thousands of miles away, it’s absolutely relevant and resonates here in Suffolk. Mr Floyd’s murder is high profile, but incidents of racism, racial hatred and discrimination happen every single day, both seen and unseen, which have enormous impacts on people’s lives. It’s not fair, right, or legal and for that reason, we believe that each time it happens, society (and those responsible) owe those affected a sincere apology and commitment to stop it in the future.”

Mr Floyd’s murder is heart-wrenching and serves as an uncomfortable reminder that despite advancements in the world of equalities and inclusion, society still isn’t equal. We’re seeing it with the health consequences of COVID-19 and the economic impact of people being out of work. This is something that must be addressed, and I want to confirm our commitment to continue to make positive changes. We have a duty to do this with the wider communities that we serve in Suffolk, but also at home here within our own organisation. This is where we want to start.”

As governors you have a duty to strategically ensure equality in your schools and the wellbeing of all BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) children.

Phanuel Mutumburi, Governor at The Beeches Community Primary School and Director of the Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality (ISCRE), shared his thoughts with us:

“The death of Mr George Floyd, 4000 miles away in Minneapolis, USA on May 25, 2020 has sparked a wave of consciousness of the racial inequalities that exists in our own society. Crowds have gathered daily in cities and towns across the United Kingdom, from London to Manchester and Birmingham to Ipswich, decrying the injustices that continue to negatively impact people from minority ethnic communities in general and black people in particular.”

The government is firmly committed to the principle that all children, irrespective of race, colour or ethnic origin, should have a good education which develops their abilities and aptitudes to the full, and legislation such as the Equality Act 2010 is

meant to protect people from unlawful discrimination. In reality however, there are many barriers that are still faced by black pupils. There are still customs, beliefs, policies and practices in our education system that lead to inequity.

Prejudice, in its nature, overlooks individual merits and qualities and the 'Education for All' - Swann Report on the education of ethnic minority children, written back in 1985, highlighted that education can and should play a central role in challenging negative stereotyping of black people. 35 years on, the government's own Racial Disparity Audit sadly confirms that racial disadvantage and discrimination is still widespread within our school system. Children from black backgrounds are more likely to be excluded from school and many still lag behind their white peers.

Solidarity statements alone cannot address the systemic inequality that pervades our education system and as school governors, we have a critical role in leading positive change. We need to have the conviction to create more equitable schools that give the same opportunities to all children no matter their racial backgrounds.

The diversity in teaching in our schools is not keeping pace with pupil demographics. A recent poll showed that the majority of black and minority ethnic teachers in British schools continue to experience forms of covert racism such as microinsults and microinvalidations. These negative experiences, together with lack of support and low progression opportunities, often lead to fewer people from those backgrounds joining the teaching profession.

As governors, we should be taking more interest in the recruitment, retention and progression of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic teachers in our schools. Black pupils are more likely to see Black teachers as role models and make a connection between the behaviour modelled by Black teachers and their own behaviour, aspirations or achievement.

Governing bodies should reflect the communities they operate in and there is evidence to show that diverse governing bodies are better at decision making as they draw from a range of perspectives. According to the 2017 annual school governance survey, just 4% of school governors and trustees are from an ethnic minority. This compares to around a third of pupils being from an ethnic minority, and 13.5% teachers being from an ethnic minority.

As governors, we should challenge any conscious and unconscious bias in our schools. The fact that Black children are more likely to perform better in externally marked exams rather than assessments marked by their own teachers, points to low expectations as a key reason for the disparity.

Governing bodies should examine how equality and community cohesion policies are being implemented through activities and priorities, to ensure fairness and equity in our schools.”

You may recall an article that was included in issue #33 of Governor Headlines in March 2020 on school policies for racism and homophobia. Some schools choose to address racism as part of their anti-bullying policy, while others include it in their behaviour policy. Wherever your school includes this information, it should be shared with staff, pupils and parents.

As stated in the article:

“Responsibility for determining behaviour policy under Section 89 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 sits with the Headteacher, this is usually overseen by the governing body. The safeguarding responsibilities and Equality Duty belong to the Headteacher and governors together. In terms of routine monitoring, it is expected that Headteachers’ reports to governors include the number of bullying incidents, racist incidents and homophobic incidents that have occurred since the last report, with any actions that have been taken as a result. It is good practice for the safeguarding governor to check that the school’s bullying log and racist incident log is being kept and reviewed by SLT, as part of their safeguarding monitoring. These logs should be reviewed by senior staff to identify any potential connections or patterns in the behaviour of perpetrators and victims.

Beyond the monitoring of recording and reporting, governors should ask questions about when and how issues of prejudice are challenged in the day-to-day life of the school, and how equality is promoted. This could be part of monitoring visits in any area of the curriculum or safeguarding and should include consideration of staff training and expertise.

Please click [here](#) to familiarise yourself with the full article.

Governance During COVID-19

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

The governance role has undoubtedly been an altered one throughout the last few months and will continue to be so for some time. As mentioned in the introduction to this newsletter, we are truly grateful for all that you are doing to support your schools and their senior leaders during this time. All Headteachers will be experiencing a range of pressures and uncertainties, so please do support them and work together with them in their decision making and with regard to their well-being.

We have spoken to a number of governors in Suffolk about their experiences of governing during the Coronavirus outbreak; the highs and lows and how they have had to adapt under lockdown. You can read their thoughts below.

Helen Armstrong – Chair of Governors at East Bergholt CEVC Primary School

Highs:

It has been positive to see so many Governor resources moved online, including Governor Briefings and learning. As a Chair, it is vital that you continually update your skills and knowledge, and I have found this has saved many hours of my time not to mention travel and childcare costs. It is also really reassuring to know that our Governors are now confident in joining meetings via Video Conference. (I am still hopeful Pecuniary Interest forms will be moved online at some point!). We held a virtual Full Governing meeting and it was as thorough, if not more thorough, than meetings in person. Those who may not be so confident to ask questions in person were able to make use of the chat facility, which meant we had more challenge and questioning in the meeting. I believe it will also change the way we run meetings in the future and may move some of the committees, e.g. the Finance committee, online to help people manage their workloads better.

It has also been excellent to see an increase in the use of technology between parents and teachers, and I do hope this is something that we can continue after the pandemic.

Lows:

I have found it challenging fulfilling the role of Chair through this crisis due to the pressures of running a business from home while home-schooling. At times the additional role of a governor has almost tipped me over the edge. It has been stressful at times worrying about whether I am fulfilling my duty. I would have liked more time to keep up to date with the guidance as it was issued and benchmark against other schools a little more.

Alison Huard – Chair of Governors at Capel St Mary CEVC Primary School

- 1. Over the first couple of weeks of lockdown we chose how to host our virtual meetings and I have also set up a WhatsApp group so that non-confidential messages can be quickly sent round (e.g. was used by one governor just to say that she was having trouble logging in but would get there). WhatsApp is very helpful. We had already agreed the virtual meeting protocol just before lockdown so that was OK. Meetings have been hosted by our Head, who is also using this platform for virtual staff meetings.*
- 2. Only one of our governors cannot access meetings at the moment as he is seriously visually impaired and his mobile is also not a smartphone – I have been in telephone contact regularly to let him know what is coming up and take any comments he has to the meeting.*

3. *We have continued to hold our regular cycle of committee meetings. So far, each has lasted about an hour or less and our clerk has been able to minute as usual. The only meeting we missed was the FGB on 23 March as we just couldn't get up and running that quickly.*
4. *I think we have all appreciated being able to 'see' each other in the online meetings, rather than just hear, as it helps reduce isolation.*
5. *The first couple of 'emergency' policies – Safeguarding and Behaviour addendums – were sent round for email consensus and I took Chair's action to formally adopt them. We did the same with our Head's plans and risk assessment and further for reopening this week and governors posted comments/questions via GovernorHub which worked well.*
6. *We have continued with our usual cycle of policy discussion/updates at committee meetings and will ratify this term's at the FGB later in June.*
7. *Meeting agendas have been 'pruned' and we are primarily using the National Governance Association (NGA) guidance for what we need to discuss.*
8. *Monitoring has, inevitably, been done remotely: I have had regular online meetings with our Head as Chair and send round a brief note of the main points. Our Safeguarding governor has also done this, and our SEND governor plans to do this with the SENDCo in the next couple of weeks. We'll then have a small number of monitoring visit reports.*
9. *Website is being kept up to date by the school and one of our governors is nominated to check it for us.*
10. *We have one vacancy, which we have not actively tried to fill since lockdown, but that can wait now until September.*
11. *Our SDP has been put on the 'back burner' – it also needs updating in light of our 'good' OFSTED report just before lockdown (we must have been one of the last schools to be 'done' then!). Our Head has now found a revised format on the Key for next year – in the light of all the lockdown, lack of SAT's etc, and suggests using this for the SDP next year.*
12. *We plan to continue our virtual meetings until July at least – and then see what the situation is for September!*

Top Tip

Make good use of any chat facilities during your virtual meetings. Helen Armstrong mentions above that this option is a good way for governors to raise points that they may not usually feel comfortable in voicing. We have also been advised by another governor that the chat facility, common to most virtual meeting packages, can also be used to alert the Chair of Governors that you have a point to be raised, which is useful in ensuring that nobody is speaking over others.

Risk Assessments

IMPORTANCE: ALL SCHOOLS WHO IT'S FOR: STATUTORY

Governing bodies will have been working with Headteachers to ensure the Risk Assessments for wider opening have been completed to consider the school's response to the government's ambition for the wider opening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

[Risk Assessment Template](#) - for wider opening of schools (Primary)

[Risk Assessment Template](#) - for wider opening of schools (Secondary)

To support the Risk Assessment document, the Principles and Planning documents below were developed through collaboration with sector leads, unions, professional associations and other stake holders for both Primary and Secondary Schools. These documents are intended to support leaders in the decision-making process and complement the Risk Assessment documents.

[Suffolk Principles and Planning Support](#) - (Primary)

[Suffolk Principles and Planning Support](#) – (Secondary)

Both documents have been put together using the guidance from the DfE on the wider opening of schools which was updated on 15 June. Do continue to read updated guidance as it is subject to change.

[Planning Guide for Primary Schools](#)

[Guidance for Secondary Schools Provision](#)

As a Governing Body, it is of paramount importance that you review the risk assessments on a regular basis, in line with the current DfE guidance. It is also crucial that you have a sound awareness of the DfE guidance that is being regularly produced for schools in direct response to the COVID-19 situation. The DfE allows you to sign up by email so you receive alerts to indicate when new guidance or updates are released.

If you have a concern or query about your risk assessment, please contact the LA's Safety, Health and Wellbeing Advisor at nina.bickerton@suffolk.gov.uk.

Retaining Governance Normality

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

The Governance During COVID-19 article above shows a small part of the resilience that you all have shown in your governance roles over the past few months and will no doubt show over the coming ones. We are all facing different challenges and the most vital part of your role currently is to ensure the wellbeing of your school leaders and support them with the continued reviewing of risk assessments in your schools, while remaining as up-to-date as you can with COVID-19 guidance released by the Department for Education (DfE)

In addition, we want to stress the importance of trying to govern in as normal a way as possible. We appreciate that there will be parts of your usual governance role that you aren't currently able to carry out, for example monitoring visits. However, there are also many other things that you would usually be doing, or could be doing, before the end of term. We cannot yet say what the education landscape will be in September but retaining a degree of normality now will put us all in a better position for the beginning of the new school year.

Below are some examples of what you could be focusing on:

- Now is a great time to be reviewing any policies that are due for renewal, for example your pay policy. We would also suggest spending some time updating your complaints policy, even if it isn't within your renewal window. The DfE have recently published an updated version of their [School complaints procedures: guidance for schools](#) document, which gives guidance for Local Authority maintained schools about setting up or reviewing complaints procedures.
- Remain vigilant over any general health and safety requirements and ensure usual monitoring checks are in place.
- Remain mindful of varying staff experiences, for example of caretakers who have worked through lockdown with no breaks and staff who are shielding.
- Ensure that communication with families and relevant agencies are open and transparent and that parental expectations are managed appropriately.
- Consider staffing leadership roles and responsibilities as required to address new priorities and consult with your Headteacher and other school leaders on drafting plans for September, including the induction of new staff members.
- Ensure vulnerable learners are identified and added to the Vulnerable Learners' Virtual School Hub.

Did you know:

Suffolk County Council no longer has a model complaints policy for schools to use as the DfE published their own version in 2019. Please update your policy if you haven't yet done so.

Did you know?

The Department for Education (DfE) have recently published temporary changes to their exclusions process [regulations](#), allowing schools greater flexibility when considering exclusions during COVID-19.

School Parking

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

As schools begin to open to a wider number of pupils, you may need to think about parking arrangements at your school. It's possible that some parents will not feel comfortable in sending their children to school by way of public transport or their usual school travel options, so may decide to drive them to school themselves.

While the practical management of this is an operational consideration for your Headteacher and other senior leaders, as governors you may like to consider communicating with parents about the best way to drop off and collect their children. If you have access to a local newsletter you may also like to use this to communicate with the wider community about the potential for some disruption at certain times of the day.

Suffolk Headlines

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

Special editions of Suffolk Headlines, featuring messages from Allan Cadzow, Director for Children and Young People at Suffolk County Council, have been sent out daily to Headteachers and other senior leaders throughout the lockdown period. [You can view recent issues of Suffolk Headlines here](#). Governors do not receive copies of Suffolk Headlines directly but are more than welcome to [subscribe](#).

Further Listening

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

The National Governance Association (NGA) have launched a governance podcast called Governance Chatters. Should you be interested in listening to this, the podcast can be accessed through their [website](#) or through your usual podcast provider.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Schools' Choice Training Opportunities

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

This has been a very busy time for governors and trustees as you have been supporting school leaders in decisions about the wider opening of schools, but if you do have some spare time please remember that Schools' Choice still have training opportunities available for you.

All subscribers to Schools' Choice's full training package have access to e-learning via Learning Link. A module list can be found [here](#), along with [instructions on how to log on](#).

There are also virtual training sessions which can be booked on GovernorHub in the usual way. All sessions for 2020/21 are also available to book on GovernorHub.

If you have an queries on governor training please contact Schools' Choice governor.support@schoolschoice.org or phone 01473 263993.



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.