

GOVERNOR HEADLINES

Welcome to issue #32 of Governor Headlines for February 2020.

This edition includes advice on social media usage as governors, how to manage parental complaints and how to monitor the wellbeing of your Headteacher and other members of staff. Also included is an update on 2020/21 school funding for maintained schools and information on relationship, sex education and health education. In addition, there is a reminder of upcoming Schools' Choice courses that you may wish to book a place on.

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

CORE GOVERNANCE INFORMATION

Parental Complaints

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

Complaints levelled at the school are not limited to parents or carers of children that are registered at the school. Any person, including members of the public, may make a complaint about any aspect of school life including the behaviour of children, staff or discourteous parking.

If you receive a parental complaint, we are always willing to discuss the process with you and give you advice about what steps to take. We will work with you every step of the way and can assist you appointing investigators, if applicable, and will support you to find a resolution.

The Local Authority no longer provides a model policy, but in 2019 the DfE published guidance on complaints and added a model policy for schools to use if they wish. This can be found [here](#). If you are still using a Suffolk LA policy, then we strongly suggest that you review it against the updated DfE guidance. If you would like support or wish to discuss it further, please get in contact.

See below for some top tips on what to do and not do if you receive a complaint.

Don't discuss complaints with complainants yourself.

If a parent approaches you with a complaint about the school, do not try and address it there and then. Direct them to your school's complaints policy. As a governor, you need to avoid discussions with individuals about school management issues.

Do...

There will be different policies for staff and parental complaints, now is a good time to check they are up to date. The Department for Education (DfE) published a policy for schools to adopt if they wish.

Don't deviate from your policies.

Always check your own policies before taking any action to respond to a complaint and follow them to the letter. The DfE will review complaints if requested by parents but this will be a review of whether the complaint was dealt with in line with your policy. They will not review the body of the complaint.

Do ...

Be objective and non-adversarial. It is important that the complaint is given due consideration. There may be legitimate improvements that can be made following the response. It can be daunting to make a complaint to the school, so it is likely that the complainant feels that they have just cause.

Don't post anything on social media.

You might see the complaint being discussed on social media – especially if you're a parent governor and are on Facebook or in WhatsApp groups with other parents. Whatever you do, don't wade in. This could make things worse and is likely to go against your school's complaints policy. As above, it's not your job to talk to individuals about school issues, especially when your comments will be out in public. Don't talk to the press. Similarly, don't comment to the press unless it's been approved by your school.

Do...

As a preventative measure, make sure your school has a social media policy or set of guidelines in place that cover how you'll respond to a situation like this. Agree this as a governing board and make sure everyone is on the same page. If your school is still a maintained school and you are contacted by the press Suffolk County Council's press office are available to advise you.

Don't let the Headteacher or other governors get involved initially if they're not meant to.

It's understandable for Headteachers to want to keep an eye on what's going on with a complaint. It's also understandable for governors to turn to the Headteacher for reassurance. Governors will also, with the best of intentions, want to be able to solve issues.

Do...

Ensure that the agreed governor, has full responsibility for the complaint. They can share with the Headteacher and governors that there has been a complaint, but **all** details of the complaint and complainant should remain confidential. The Chair of Governors is likely to be the default contact for governors. Once the Chair has been involved, they cannot form part of the process later. Do they have skills you may wish to use for any potential hearing? If so, is there someone who can be the initial contact? How will this be communicated to the school and the wider community?

Don't share information freely.

If you're not sure someone needs information about the complaint, don't share it. It might add to data protection worries on top of dealing with the initial complaint. Sometimes the information is sensitive, and it will usually involve someone's personal data.

Do...

Only use approved communication channels. For example, if your board uses GovernorHub for documents relating to the complaint, always use this and don't attach information to emails or send text messages about the matter. Ensure that GovernorHub is up to date and that the permissions are set so that only the appropriate governors, if any, have access to this information. Ensure you have a personal school email address and use this for any governance work.

Do you have any experience about dealing with complaints that you would like to share? If you do, please get in touch with our Leadership and Governance team at governance@suffolk.gov.uk or 01473 263972.

Social Media Usage as Governors

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

Social media is highly prevalent and, for many, a preferred way of communication. However, are you aware of how social media may impact on your role as a governor? In this article we give you some advice on how to manage social media usage within your school and on what to do if you are contacted through social media in your capacity as a governor.

Whilst it isn't statutory, some schools choose to have a social media policy. This sets out how social media should be used in school by pupils, staff, governors, parent helpers and other school visitors, ensuring that everyone knows what's acceptable and what isn't. This also gives you something to refer individuals to, should they be using social media in an inappropriate way.

If you choose not to have a social media policy, you may instead like to embed your expectations on social media usage into another of your policies. It's also good practice to include a section on governor use of social media into your code of conduct.

Once you're clear on your behaviour standards for social media usage, you must also make sure that you, your Headteacher and other members of staff, are clear on how to respond if these standards aren't met. For example, if a parent is using a social media platform to voice concerns about the school or attempting to contact a staff member or governor on a personal social media account.

If a parent uses a social media account to make a complaint about the school, you should not respond on the same platform. Instead, ensure that your complaints policy is up to date and published on your school's website so that the parent can be directed to it. Complaints made without following your complaints procedure are not considered "formal" and so do not have to be addressed, however tempting it may be to respond to inflammatory social media messages.

In addition, you may like to consider removing yourself from any social media group where you are likely to hear of a complaint. If the complaint is then made formal, anything that you may have read on social media may compromise your ability to investigate the claim or to sit on a potential complaints panel. Similarly, we wouldn't advise that you link your governor email address to your personal social media account.

Should a pupil attempt to befriend you on a social media account, never accept their request. If a parent tries to add you on social media, refer to your governor code of conduct in deciding whether to accept. Our advice would be to decline the request wherever appropriate, explaining to the parent your reasons for doing so if you think this necessary.

Did You Know?

The writing of school policies is an operational task, and therefore should not be undertaken by governors, whose role is a strategic one. Policies will instead be written by staff, usually by the Headteacher or another senior leader. A governor's job is instead to monitor the writing of policies, ensuring that they are fit for purpose and align with the priorities of the school.

Each school and governing body will have their own opinion on acceptable and unacceptable use of social media; however, we hope that the information in the article has given you some tips.

Governor Monitoring of Headteacher and Staff Wellbeing

IMPORTANCE: USEFUL TO KNOW

WHO IT'S FOR: ALL SCHOOLS (but including information specific to maintained schools)

Governors of maintained schools have a statutory responsibility to ensure that the Headteacher and teachers achieve a satisfactory work-life balance.

As stated on page 19 of the [Governance Handbook](#), published by the Department for Education (DfE):

“The School teachers' pay and conditions document 2018 (STPCD) requires boards and headteachers of maintained schools to have regard to the need for the headteacher and teachers to be able to achieve a satisfactory balance between the time required to discharge their professional duties and the time required to pursue their personal interests outside work. All boards and executive leaders should ensure that they adhere to the working limits set out in [legislation](#).”

You must therefore ensure that you have policies and processes in place to ensure this work-life balance and be mindful of how any new policies or requests on staff may impact upon their workload. For example, if you intend to carry out a monitoring visit always make your intentions clear to the relevant member/s of staff and give them ample time to prepare for your visit. Always schedule visits and meetings so that they don't affect other commitments and don't make unnecessary requests for reports or other information.

If you are a Chair of Governors you may meet with your Headteacher on a regular basis, outside of full governing body meetings. If so, this is a perfect opportunity to check on their wellbeing and ensure that their workload is appropriate and manageable. If you find that your Headteacher's workload is having a negative impact on their wellbeing and work-life balance, you may decide to review your staffing structure, in which case always contact your HR case worker for advice in the first instance. If you have other concerns about the wellbeing of your Headteacher please contact EducationOfficersResolution@suffolk.gov.uk to speak to one of our Education Officers.

In addition to ensuring the wellbeing of your Headteacher, you should also be checking that the Headteacher is in turn managing the wellbeing of other staff members and promoting a positive culture within the school.

Some questions that you may like to put to the Headteacher could include:

- How do they delegate workload and responsibilities amongst staff and how do they know that this method works?
- How do they monitor workload and working hours?
- Who has responsibility for wellbeing within school and have they been appropriately trained (this is usually a senior leader)?
- Are all staff aware of access to counselling, for example of [the Employee Assistance Wellbeing Service](#) run by Schools' Choice?
- Are they confident that staff have access to the resources they need in order to do their job properly?
- How do they promote good levels of communication within school and do all staff have the opportunity to have their thoughts or concerns addressed?

If these questions lead to identification of any gaps or shortfalls, you will need to formulate a plan for rectifying this. Set specific targets and put a plan in place to meet them, however, always remember that a governor's role is a strategic one and that challenge to the Headteacher must be done supportively.

If you would like further advice on monitoring the work-life balance of your Headteacher and other members of staff, you may like to read some of the article available on The Key for School Governors.

Parent Governor Responsibilities

IMPORTANCE: STATUTORY **WHO IT'S FOR: MAINTAINED SCHOOLS**

Although they are elected by parents at the school, the role of parent governor is no different to that of any other governor type on the governing body. Parent governors are not a representative of the parent body and their duty is to the school and the safety, wellbeing and education of its pupils, not to the other parents.

All governors should therefore have a strong focus on the three core strategic functions of governance:

- Ensuring clarity of ethos, vision and strategic direction.
- Holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, as well as the management of its staff.
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and ensuring its budget is well spent.

It is a legal requirement for maintained schools to have at least two parent governors. If you are part of a federation you may be tempted to try to elect a parent governor from each of your schools, however any parent governor vacancy must be

advertised to all parents at all schools with the federation and all parents must be given the right to stand. This may mean that all your parent governor positions are filled by parents of children at one school in your federation, however as parent governors are not representatives of parents this is not a problem.

For further information on governing body constitution for maintained schools please read [The Constitution of Governing Bodies of Maintained Schools](#) statutory regulations published by the Department of Education.

Top Tip:

If you have a long-standing co-opted vacancy on your governing body, it may be tempting to fill this by appointing an eager parent or member of staff. However, we would always advise caution when appointing additional parent or staff members into co-opted positions, as this can lead to an overly inward-focused governing body. It's always beneficial to have a balance between governors who are directly linked to the school, through their children or employment, and those who aren't.

School Funding Update 2020-21

National Funding Formula (NFF) and Schools' Funding

IMPORTANCE: STATUTORY

WHO IT'S FOR: MAINTAINED SCHOOLS (but with information that may be application to academies)

Increases to Education funding announced in August 2019 will see the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) nationally, rising by £2.6 billion for 2020-21, £4.8 billion for 2021-22 and £7.1 billion for 2022-23 compared to 2019-20. The £2.6 billion includes £780 million extra for high needs in 2020-21. On top of this £1.5 billion per year is being provided to fund additional pension costs for teachers.

Schools Forum agreed that Suffolk should adopt the NFF with effect from 2018-19 and this approach is continuing when setting the budget for 2020-21. This will ensure that the funding at school level remains consistent to reflect the funding which will be received by individual schools when the NFF is fully implemented. At this stage there is no set date when the 'hard' formula will be introduced. By agreeing to follow the rationale as set out by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) it will enable a smooth transition to the 'hard' NFF and allow our schools to plan with more

certainty in the lead up to it being implemented. There are now 81 LAs which have moved to the NFF in 2019-20 with Suffolk being one of the first to adopt this approach.

In total cash terms Suffolk sees a 4.5% increase in schools block funding. Total funding for schools equates to £429.2m. Per pupil, the increase is just over £200 on 2019-20. However, if schools have less pupils then actual funding could reduce.

Financial Planning

There is a continued need to plan in these financially challenging and uncertain times. The government has introduced the NFF with the aim of providing some more clarity regarding budgets moving forward. As stated previously, Suffolk has also chosen to implement the formula in full which should enable schools to better plan.

The LA requires these plans to be submitted early in the new financial year. Further details and deadlines are shared with schools' once budgets are published in February each year.

There are four main reasons that schools should pay close attention to their plans.

- To ensure school governors and leadership look at and scrutinise income and expenditure and consider the implications for their schools and what key decisions need to be made for the coming year / longer term.
- To think carefully and creatively about the future position of the school and look at options and risks.
- To provide information for decision making, especially around the cost of staffing and the need for schools to have effective, flexible, and affordable staffing structures.
- To enable the LA to assess risk and target intervention where it is most needed.

School Budget Plan Toolkit

The budget toolkits will again remain unchanged in 2020-21, providing stability and continuity for school finance staff, leadership teams and governing bodies. There are two stages to schools' financial planning and the submission of budget plans.

First Step – 2020-21 Detailed Budget

Schools will receive their 2020-21 budget toolkits on 14th February to aid with earlier planning. The toolkit will be published this year on the [Suffolk Learning](#) website. The LA requires a copy of the budget toolkit (containing the 2020-21 approved budget) by 30 April 2020. Schools are required to update the budget plan page of the

budget toolkit to confirm the prepared by / date of preparation and the date of the meeting at which the 2020-21 budget plan was approved. The completed 2020-21 budget planning toolkit should then be returned to the LA by the appropriate means, of which the Finance staff are aware of.

Second Step – Strategic, High Level Plans (Strategy Toolkit) for 2021-22 & 2022-23

Schools will then continue to work on the same toolkit completing the 3-Year Budget with a detailed line by line budget for the following two years. This will be based on one realistic scenario. Although this may be more time consuming to complete initially, we believe it should reduce questions governors potentially could have and reduce errors. Therefore, overall it will have a neutral or minimal impact on governor's time. The 3 Year plans will need to be signed off by governors during the first half of the Summer Term 2020. A copy of the approved toolkit will need to be with the LA by 31 May 2019.

If you have any queries about the information contained in this article please contact Michael Quinton, Senior Service Accountant, Michael.Quinton@suffolk.gov.uk.

OTHER RELEVANT INFORMATION FROM THE LOCAL AUTHORITY

Relationships, Sex Education and Health Education 2020

IMPORTANCE: STATUTORY

WHO IT'S FOR: GOVERNORS OF ALL SCHOOLS (in order to highlight the events to senior leadership teams, and PSHE/RSE Leads)

It's 2020 and RSHE goes live in the autumn term! Public Health are continuing to work with schools in preparation for the new guidance, with a dedicated post to support schools. If your setting is already engaged, please stay involved. If you were not aware of this support, please contact the Schools Engagement Coordinator (contact details below) or encourage the senior leadership/ PSHE lead to do so as a priority.

Initial school's engagement events have already been held throughout the county during the autumn term with over 200 PSHE leads and senior leaders attending, providing representation from approximately 54% of schools in Suffolk. The events have informed schools of their statutory obligations and will help to support them in their journey preparing for and embedding the guidance ready for September 2020. The events have also enabled those responsible for PSHE and specifically RSHE to network with each other, supporting the sharing of good practice. Further events are

being planned for the Spring and Summer terms as a continuation of the support to facilitate engagement around the new legislation and support schools with planning PSHE lessons that meet the statutory requirements. Please keep up to date with Suffolk Headlines, Schools Choice Schools News and within your setting for further details as this becomes available.

The Schools Engagement Coordinator has also attended Governor briefings hosted by Schools Choice during January 2020 in order to further raise the awareness of the new statutory legislation.

To further support schools, an online portal of resources and signposting is in the process of being developed. This will be populated with information as this becomes available, and the same communications procedure will apply as above to communicate when this is ready for access.

A steering group of PSHE leads has also been set up to work with the Schools Engagement Coordinator to ensure that a teaching perspective is reflected throughout the work being undertaken by Public Health to prepare schools for the new RSHE legislation.

A survey to identify the RSHE/PSHE currently being offered and how Suffolk schools are planning to implement the new guidance was launched in July 2019. To date, this has been completed by 91% of schools, with 31 schools still required to complete this and provide contact details in order that the Schools Engagement Coordinator can communicate directly and effectively with the person responsible for PSHE/RSHE. The head teachers of the remaining schools have been contacted by letter during December to ensure that communications are reaching these settings and to encourage completion of the survey and engagement with the support being offered by Public Health.

At this stage in the academic year schools should have already done, or be in the process of doing, the following:

- Familiarising themselves with the guidance as a priority, including policy and curriculum requirements.
- Allocating senior leadership, including the strong recommendation of a Link Governor, for RSHE.
- Auditing current practice against the new guidance and identifying strengths as well as any gaps that need to be addressed.
- Consulting with pupils so their knowledge of relationships, growing up and being healthy can be ascertained.
- Consulting with parents following feedback from the pupil consultation, incorporating parental views into policy and practice.
- Constructing a policy and identifying which scheme of work the school will be using.
- Identifying appropriate resources to support the curriculum.
- Ratifying and publishing the policy.

- Engaging with the support offered by Public Health and attending the RSHE events once advertised (likely to be in March 2020).

If you need any advice, guidance, support or have any questions about the guidance or processes in working towards it, please contact Jane Stannard, Schools Engagement Coordinator at jane.stannard@suffolk.gov.uk in the first instance, or 01473 263296/ 07704 018368.

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Schools' Choice Training Courses in February 2020

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

Schools' Choice have spaces left on their training sessions this term. Please take a look at their training brochure <https://view.pagetiger.com/Gov/2019>

Why not try the following:

- Being an Effective Chair and Leader of Governance - 10th Feb at Howard Primary School
- Monitoring the Pupil Premium - 25th Feb at Suffolk One

Plus, don't forget the SEND webinars taking place on 11th and 12th February – book on GovernorHub to be sent the joining details. Alternatively contact Schools' Choice on governor.training@schoolschoice.org.

Did You Know?

Ofsted are asking questions about what training governors have had and how it's informed practice and decision making. When considering which training courses to book onto, ensure that you are taking into account the priorities laid out in your School Development Plan (SDP), as well as any identified gaps in skills.



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.