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|  | **Governance Update:****Good Governance During the Coronavirus Pandemic** |

**Our 7 Principles of Good Governance During the Coronavirus Pandemic**

We have visited (remotely) many of our schools since September 2020 to talk about good governance during the coronavirus pandemic and how governance needs to respond to the uniquely challenging circumstances facing our school leaders. This update summarises our 7 principles of good governance, which we have developed from the Department for Education’s Governance Updates since June 2020, and from National Governance Association advice.

Good governance during the pandemic will be supportive, strategic and pragmatic. These three themes provide the structure for our principles of good governance.

**Supportive Governance**

**Principle 1: Good governance fosters collaborative and open relationships with senior leaders**

Collaborative, supportive and open relationships between the governors, head teacher and senior leadership team continue to be vital. Headteachers remain responsible for day-to-day operational decisions, while it is the role of governors to provide strategic direction, oversight and support to the senior leadership team.

We encourage governors to:

* **Make time** at a governors’ meeting for your headteacher to reflect on his/her personal workload and wellbeing, the workload of the senior leadership team and daily life in school.
* **Take practical steps** to support and care for your headteacher. Examples from our schools include: reducing their reporting workload to governors meetings to what is most essential and urgent; allowing them to work from home one day a week; providing a listening ear; co-signing communications to parents or staff; writing to all staff and parents to express your confidence in the school’s leadership and appreciation for their hard work.
* **Work together** with your headteacher to realign the strategic priorities and committee terms of reference for this current school year, in recognition of the pandemic’s impact on school life.

**Principle 2: Good governance supports school leaders in responding to staff and parental concerns**

Governors should be reassured that the school is listening to and addressing any concerns raised by parents, carers or staff. Responding to such concerns is an operational matter for the school’s senior leaders, and governors should not be involved unless the matter escalates into a formal complaint under the school’s complaints policy and procedures.

We encourage governors to:

* **Be satisfied** that senior leaders are communicating effectively with staff, parents, carers and the local community, and understand the types of concerns that are arising.
* **Be ready** to advocate within the school community on behalf of your headteacher’s operational decisions, in a way that reflects the school’s vision and values, such as co-signing communications to staff, parents and carers.
* **Avoid** being drawn into social media discussions about the school’s provision for pupils and staff. Instead, point parents to the proper way to resolve their concerns via talking with a responsible staff member about the issue.

**Strategic Governance**

**Principle 3: Good governance places the welfare of pupils and staff at the heart of all decision-making**

The welfare of pupils and staff should be at the heart of all decision-making. As the responsible authority for the school premises and as employer of all school staff, governors remain accountable for safeguarding and promoting the health and wellbeing of children, and for the welfare of school staff.

The head teacher and senior leaders remain responsible for monitoring the effectiveness of the school’s coronavirus risk assessment and updating it as local circumstances or government guidance change. The risk assessment should be treated as a ‘living document’ by governors, who should regularly seek reassurance that it is fit for purpose and fully compliant with the DfE’s public health guidance and systems of controls to minimise transmission risk.

We encourage governors to:

* **Ensure** they are satisfied that the staffing arrangements promote good work-life balance, accommodate flexible working, and address staff mental health and wellbeing.
* **Seek information** about the school’s wellbeing initiatives and pastoral care for children who are learning from home.
* **Support** school leaders in all they are doing to reach vulnerable and disadvantaged children and monitor the pandemic’s impact on this particular group, as well as other groups such as children with special needs.
* **Update**, in conjunction with school leaders, the school’s safeguarding policy and procedures to account for the shift to remote learning, as well as contingency plans for isolation of classes or year group bubbles once schools resume.
* **Continue** to carry out termly monitoring checks of the school’s compliance with Keeping Children Safe in Education, including the SCR and DSL signage on school premises.

**Principle 4: Good governance maintains strategic oversight of teaching and learning**

The pandemic has significantly disrupted teaching and learning and led to the widespread cancellation of standard assessments and exams. Within this context, governors remain responsible for holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school, but should not become involved in operational decisions about remote education delivery.

We encourage governors to:

* **Review** the breadth and depth of the school’s curriculum for both in-school and remote learning, including pupil physical and mental health and wellbeing.
* **Understand and monitor** the effectiveness of the school’s approach to remote and in-school learning, including compliance with DfE guidance and support for pupils and parents to access remote learning, particularly for disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND.
* **Monitor** staff workloads and resource allocation in the context of remote curriculum delivery, including CPD.
* **Assess** the impact of Ofsted/SIAMS delay.
* **Understand** how, going forward, the school will assess the ongoing impact of lost learning and lost time in school, and the impact on the governors’ strategic priorities for the school. This will involve reviewing the school’s revised recovery plan and catch-up curriculum.

**Principle 5: Good governance maintains strategic oversight of the school’s financial position**

Governors remain responsible for overseeing the school’s financial position and ensuring that its resources are well-used. We encourage governors to:

* **Monitor** pandemic-related costs and overall impact on the budget (e.g. supply staff, premises adaptations, cleaning supplies, lost income).
* **Understand** the resource implications of new/different operational plans and consider whether reallocation is necessary or appropriate.
* **Prioritise** impactful spend of the catch-up and pupil premiums to address lost learning, particularly among vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils.
* **Ensure** all DfE extra funding sources are applied for, and provide practical support to school business managers in this regard if required.

**Pragmatic Governance**

**Principle 6: Good governance prioritises the core governance functions**

We recommend that for as long as the pandemic continues to impact education, governors should pare back their activities to what is essential and urgent, as a means of reducing headteacher workload. Each governing board should consider what business-critical risks must be addressed in this current school year, and what priorities can be deferred.

We encourage all governing bodies to:

* **Aim** to holdshorter, focused meetings, and work with the clerk to identify and prioritise urgent and essential business.
* **Assess** whetherit is reasonable for committees to continue to meet, and consider suspending or adapting their terms of reference for the pandemic and recovery phase.
* **Ensure** compliance with all statutory and contractual obligations.
* **Defer** non-essential oversight/monitoring activities and data collections, and adapt headteacher reporting, to reduce the workload of the senior leadership team.
* **Plan** alternative forms of governor monitoring visits via remote/virtual means, in consultation with school leaders.
* **Endorse** an appropriate recovery plan for the current school year, rather than creating an entirely new strategic plan.
* **Continue** to manage parental complaints and HR panel hearings in accordance with policies and procedures, with the assistance of the LDBS should remote hearings need to be held.
* **Be aware** of DfE guidance about process changes for admissions appeals and exclusions reviews.
* **Continue to hold** parent/staff governor elections where practicable, although it is acceptable to defer parent governor elections until schools have reopened.
* **Recruit** senior staff as normal.

**Principle 7: Good governance involves evaluating quality and impact**

Effective governance involves self-evaluation. We recommend that governors should pause to reflect and evaluate:

* The effectiveness of remote governing board meetings. Take note of what has worked well, what could work better, and apply this to future meetings. Chairs may want to discuss with clerks some practical ideas to facilitate the smooth running of meetings to ensure that all governors are able to participate as effectively as possible.
* The impact of your governance during the pandemic, through the filter of the school’s Christian vision, asking: How has our Christian vision informed and guided our governance work, to enable pupils and staff to flourish during this time?

**DfE guidance**

The DfE’s collection of governance guidance since the pandemic began is available here: [School governance update - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-governance-update). No new guidance has been issued since the January school closures.

**In-person governor meetings**

If schools open as planned in early March, we nonetheless recommend that governors continue to meet remotely for as long as social distancing restrictions are in place. The safety and workload of school staff, including the clerk to governors, should be paramount.
 **LDBS advice and services**

Your School Link Adviser and our Head of Governance Services, Anne Messer, are all happy to assist if you have any questions or would like practical advice during this time. Please refer to our website for individual contact details: <https://www.ldbs.co.uk/history/our-staff/>

29 January 2020