



COVID-19: Tips and advice for school governors

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected society more than anything else in our lifetime. It has especially affected the way that we live, do our work, and even how we exercise as a nation!

School closures and the advice and guidance issued by the Department for Education (**DfE**) and Public Health England have also impacted on “the business” of schools for the foreseeable future.

From speaking to people within the sector, we know that many schools and academies have really stood up to the challenge and continue to find creative ways to address the situation. To help you we have picked out the DfE’s recent COVID-19 guidance for governors and trusts and shared the experiences of our professional clerk.



Government advice and guidance

Recently, the DfE published a [school governance update](#), which highlights key guidance and advice. Here are the key points.

- The DfE will not be making any changes to the statutory governance functions in any upcoming regulations related to COVID-19.
- Avoid non-essential contact and host governor meetings online through Google Meet/Hangouts, Microsoft Teams, Skype and Zoom for example. More on this below.
- Your chair or clerk can contact your governors directly to agree virtual meeting arrangements during this lockdown period.
- [This Regulation](#) allows governors of maintained schools to approve alternative arrangements for participating in and voting at meetings.
- Governors of academy trusts would still have to check the trust's articles of association to determine if trustees can attend meetings remotely. The DfE model form articles do allow for remote meetings but the detail and extent of the permission in the articles should always be checked.
- Governing bodies are encouraged to be pragmatic about items tabled for discussion and the decisions schools are planning to take. Governors are urged to focus on urgent decisions and defer non urgent matters (even standing agenda items) to future meetings.
- Governors should prioritise supporting school leaders and staff on operational matters and communication plans should be put in place to keep governors up to date on the school's situation.
- Schools should update Get Information About Schools with relevant details – so the DfE can engage the relevant stakeholders quickly if needed.
- Put contingency plans in place in case the chair or vice chair become unavailable, so that it's clear who will channel information to and from the board.

The DfE also refers governors to the following guidance notes: [Guidance for schools, childcare providers, colleges and local authorities in England on maintaining educational provision](#); and [the Collection of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance for schools and other educational settings](#).

Our recommendations

1. You could review your trust's articles of association, terms of reference (**ToR**) and scheme of delegation (**SoD**) to clarify who is empowered to do what. However, there's no need to undertake a major review of your articles solely for COVID-19.
2. Set up a COVID-19 Response Committee with limited delegated powers. This makes sure that school leaders and key governors can collaborate and make necessary decisions.
3. Tailor your ToR and SoD to ensure effective governance, say by expanding the powers of the Chair, CEO or CFO. A contingency plan can be built into these documents to deal with emergency or urgent decision making required as a result of COVID-19 – it's best to have advice on this to avoid unintended consequences later.
4. Compile oral feedback or updates into a written report that governors can read before a meeting and circulate comments and questions in advance if you can. These comments should be properly recorded and addressed to show adequate engagement and challenge from governors.
5. Due to the impact of coronavirus, your board (even one of a large school trust) may be concerned with more operational tasks while schools remain closed. Make sure your trust is addressing the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff, safeguarding, and ongoing issues relating to hygiene of persons and school premises.
6. Record any deferred non-urgent matters so that you can easily bring those items back when it is business as usual.
7. Ask your clerk or governance professional to update internal contact details for all school governors, as well as updating Get Information About Schools. Now is also a good time to update all registers, records and policies or attend to those administrative tasks that can elude you throughout the normal school year.

Top 10 Tips for virtual meetings

1. Share login information and any instructions on how to use the system with governors well in advance.
2. Set up test calls with governors to ensure that microphones and cameras work and check everyone is comfortable with the technology.
3. Try to find a quiet location to join the meeting. If you anticipate disruptions, due to children, housemates or pets, let others on the call know to avoid surprises!
4. When you join the meeting try to introduce yourself as soon as possible. This will help your colleagues and may avoid any awkwardness or confusion later.
5. Using video can certainly add to the virtual meeting experience, but quality can hinge on your internet connection. If video plays up and disrupts your meeting, try using only audio instead.
6. If you're not speaking, mute your microphone to avoid interference. Just remember to unmute when you have something to say.
7. Check who has joined the call to determine if the meeting can start and be quorate when decisions are made. If you're not sure, a chair or clerk can take a roll call.
8. Virtual meeting technologies often include a group chat feature which can be used to log comments or questions while someone is presenting or gain group approval. Make clear at the start of the meeting whether you will be using any such feature.
9. It's important that anyone presenting or leading an agenda item pauses to invite and address comments and questions. Comments may more easily be missed in a virtual meeting.
10. If there is a breakdown in the communication or a disruption in technology this should be noted in the minutes and decisions should be halted until a quorum is present.

It goes without saying that minutes should of course be kept, so make sure remote attendance is noted. If everyone is attending remotely from different places, then the place of the meeting cannot be noted. If some attendees are physically together in one place, then note the place where most attendees are.

Check your articles of association on this. The important point is that the minutes are a clear record of how the meeting was conducted, who attended and how, and what was discussed and decided.

For further information

If you have any particular questions about your school's governance or education provision do get in touch with the Partner and Head of Education, [Tony McPhillips](#).



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