

Governor Services

How important is it to ensure the continuity of clerking at this time?

The value of effective clerking to governing boards is clear at all times. However, during the period that governing boards are adjusting to different ways of conducting their business and holding virtual meetings, the expert advice, guidance and support given by the clerk/governance professional will be invaluable. It's important that governing boards recognise this by ensuring that the clerk/governance professional has the support they need to do their job well. This may require a new or different routine for planning meetings with the chair and/or school leader, or help with setting up a virtual meeting.

What does 'holding virtual meetings' mean and how do we do it?

The COVID-19 crisis has required many of us to use unfamiliar technologies for the first time so that we can continue to work from home, communicate and meet with colleagues and clients. For most governing boards it will also be the first time they have had to consider holding virtual meetings.

The key point here is that with a small amount of preparation it is relatively easy to provide an alternative to meeting face-to-face. Once governors and trustees realise how easy and efficient the alternatives are, it may be that this will have a profound and positive effect on how business is conducted in the future.

The obvious alternatives to meeting face to face are:

- governors/trustees dialling in to a telephone conference call;
- governors/trustees signing in to an online video conference using a platform like Zoom, Skype or Microsoft Teams;
- governors/trustees using a unified communication and collaboration platform like Microsoft Teams to hold a simultaneous electronic conversation, and
- governors/trustees conducting business and voting by email correspondence.

OCC GS recommends that governing boards arrange virtual meetings by telephone, video conference or through an online platform, rather than conducting business and voting by email correspondence. The exchange of numerous emails lacks immediacy, restricts the opportunity for the governing board to interact in real time, can result in some governors/trustees losing track of others' contributions, and can make recording problematic for the clerk/governance professional. All governing boards should refer to their clerk for advice.

What should we focus our meetings on and what is meant by urgent business?

Governing boards are acutely aware of the enormous task that schools and their staff have in ensuring continuity of education and making the reduced provision work on the ground. It is therefore appropriate for all non-urgent business to be delayed and governing board meetings to be restricted to the following:

1. Business critical decisions (e.g. budget approval, ratifying school leadership appointments etc.)
2. Monitoring how the school is continuing to provide care for children who are vulnerable, children with ECHP plans the children of key workers, associated risks, issues etc.
3. Safeguarding - Monitoring the wellbeing and welfare of pupils, staff and stakeholders
4. Any issues arising from how the building is currently being used and remote working for staff
5. Support being given to parents and carers to help them educate their children at home

It follows that boards will take a pragmatic and considerate approach to the reporting of these matters, relying on oral feedback and scaled down paperwork. It might also require governing boards to review and amend their levels of delegation to enable fewer governors/trustees to make business critical decisions and thereby minimising the risk of being unable to take these decisions.

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Admissions team

When can I apply for an in-year transfer for September?

From 1 June we will accept applications. There are likely to be delays to applications being processed given the large number of expected applications and the possibility of lockdown continuing.

I missed the deadline for Reception / Year 7 transfer – can I still apply?

Yes – applications received for Reception by 5 May will be processed in the second allocation round scheduled for 9 June (date subject to working patterns affected by lockdown).

For Year 7 transfer, the deadline was 18 March for applications to be considered on 5 May. Applications can still be submitted and will be considered later in the summer.

Application forms are available from all our 'apply for a school place' webpages:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/apply-school-place>

Locality Team

What do I do if I have a concern about a child?

If you know the child's Social Worker please contact the Social Worker directly.

If you have an immediate safeguarding concern phone the MASH on 0345 050 7666

If your concern is out of hours contact Emergency duty team on 0800-833408

If your concern is not immediate safeguarding which may include families who may require practical support at this time please contact Locality and Community Support Service

LCSS North **0345 241 2703**

LCSS Central **0345 241 2705**

LCSS South **0345 241 2608**

We can't get hold of a family/they are not responding to contact, what should we do?

This depends on each family and any known risks but please try everything- calls to all numbers, texts, letter or door knock if possible.

If you have any known safeguarding concerns then please contact LCSS or MASH if immediate and we can support with agreeing a plan.

How do we support a family who are struggling emotionally and/or practically?

Please see the leaflet via this hyperlink for this and other queries:

https://search3.openobjects.com/mediamanager/oxfordshire/fsd/files/referral_pathways_for_families_accessing_support-icss_covid-19-090420.pdf

School Places Team

Are schools expected to accept children from families where there is only one parent who is a key worker? Or do both parents need to be key workers?

Children with at least one parent or carer who is critical to the coronavirus (COVID-19) response can attend school if required, although where children can be kept safe at home they should be, to limit the spread of the virus.

Why are we being approached to take children from other schools?

Some schools are unable to stay open or have reached the maximum number they can safely care for with available staffing. We need and appreciate the continuing support of schools and settings in helping us to put in place alternative arrangements to support parents in these circumstances.

Early Years/Settings

How do we support children with any kind of social care/ safeguarding needs if they are absent from Early Years childcare?

The Early Years team work very closely with The Locality and Community Support Service (LCSS), The Virtual School for Looked After Children (LAC) and Special Educational Needs (EYSEN) colleagues. All children who are supported by these services are classed as vulnerable. The government has issued guidance stating that settings should work with local authorities to monitor the welfare of vulnerable children who are not attending provision, and other children they might wish to keep in touch with, for safeguarding purposes.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures/coronavirus-covid-19-early-years-and-childcare-closures>

Our advice to you is as follows:

Virtual contact is essential. The preferred way is by telephone, skype or What's App or an email if those are not possible. Use the best communication that suits the family. Remember to check/agree a suitable time when making contact with the family.

Have a conversation about well-being, are the family ok at these uncertain times, share strategies to keep the children happy and safe, share activity ideas that are available and share other links or contacts to other support services the family might need.

If possible, have a conversation with the child, although this may not be possible. Children do not always want to talk on a phone, but they may prefer to skype. Do not press for this to happen, the idea of the call is to be supportive to the family.

Keep a record of relevant conversations in case you need to share information with other professionals

If there is no response from the parents/carers you should contact the linked professional who is working with the family. This maybe the LCSS worker, LAC advisor or a Special Education Needs advisory teacher/practitioner who is working with the child.

If you need advice about a child who you think needs SEND support you can make a no names consultation to the EYSEN Team eysenit@oxfordshire.gov.uk

If you identify a family who you think have low-level safeguarding concerns (those that are a 1 or 2 on the Threshold of Needs , pg.10) you can call LCSS.

Immediate concerns must be reported to MASH on 0345 050 7666.

Self-referrals from families can also go to LCSS or MASH if immediate.

Please remember it is important to keep in regular contact with any child who you consider vulnerable, including those who are not known to LCSS or other professionals.

Do we need to accept all children in the keyworker or vulnerable groups who ask for a place?

Schools and settings are not obliged to offer places beyond the capacity they can offer in these difficult times. If you don't have capacity please refer families on. Details of open early years providers are here. If parents are having difficulty finding a suitable early years place, please call Oxfordshire Family Information Service on 01865 323332 or email fis.enquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk