

Governing for Impact

AUTUMN TERM
2026
9th October
Issue 2

THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

FIT FOR PURPOSE

Taking a closer look at how our structures and practices support the best outcomes for children in Oxfordshire

Welcome

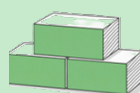
As half term approaches, we hope this edition of the Oxfordshire Governor Services newsletter offers a useful starting point for conversations with your fellow governors and school leaders. Alongside links to advice and guidance, you'll find questions to help your board reflect on its work and consider where to focus next.

There are also opportunities to get involved, and we'd value your contribution. Sharing what works well, what you find challenging and the support you need, helps us make our work more relevant to your board. Please take a look and join the conversation.

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Strategic oversight of school buildings



A focus on SEND



Making an Impact



The Big Question:
Thinking about shared responsibility

Governor Services

Supporting strong, strategic and compliant governance



OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL

Help us develop Oxfordshire's board self-evaluation model

Taking time to reflect together helps a governing board celebrate what is working well, recognise the positive difference it is making and identify where the next focus could have the greatest impact in improving governance.

We are currently testing our new **Oxfordshire Board Self-Assessment Model**, a simple and practical framework designed to make this process both manageable and meaningful for all maintained Boards. It offers a helpful starting point for open, constructive conversations about governance arrangements, ways of working and impact, using three clear stages of development to guide reflection.

By drawing on governors' shared experience and relevant evidence, the model can help the board develop a clear picture of its strengths, agree achievable next steps and set focused priorities for the year ahead. Used regularly, it can support a positive cycle of reflection, action and review—helping the board build on good practice, plan confidently for the future and strengthen its contribution to positive outcomes for all our pupils.

GET INVOLVED

If your board would be interested in testing the model for us, please contact:
governorservices@oxfordshire.gov.uk
for more information.

Free NGA support for Oxfordshire maintained schools



From September 2026, Oxfordshire maintained schools are being supported through access to National Governance Association standard membership. This includes practical governance resources, model documents and access to governor conferences and events.

All maintained school governors and governance professionals have now been set up with the **NGA Standard membership**. Follow the link in the green box to register your account.

If you are having difficulty registering, please contact us.



REGISTER HERE to access your account:
[Register with your organisation – NGA](#)

District engagement: shaping locality working across Oxfordshire

In November, Oxfordshire County Council Children's Services is holding five district-based engagement days to help develop Oxfordshire's locality cluster approach, an important part of wider work to strengthen inclusion and improve outcomes for children and young people. The events will combine presentations, discussion and workshops, using local education, inclusion, SEND and sufficiency information to help shape how locality clusters could support schools and communities.

Your Chair of Governors or SEND Governor is invited to join the Governor sessions from 4.45pm to 6.30pm, with one place available per school.

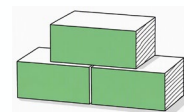
Dates and Locations

- **Cherwell** (The Pavillion, Banbury): **4 November**
- **Vale** (Abingdon Hilton) : **5 November**
- **West Oxfordshire** (Carterton Community College): **6 November**
- **Oxford City** (Oxford Academy): **12 November**
- **South Oxfordshire** (Cornerstone Arts Centre Didcot): **13 November**

*School offices and Headteachers have been emailed sign-up forms to register attendance at each event by **Friday 23rd October**, so please speak to them about doing so.*

Condition surveys: turning information into action

A condition survey gives a school an evidence-based picture of the physical condition of its buildings and site. It identifies defects, recommends remedial work and supports decisions about maintenance, investment and longer-term estate planning. It is not a structural survey and does not replace statutory inspections, risk assessments or specialist checks but it is a useful piece of information to support board action. DfE guidance recommends that responsible bodies commissions a comprehensive condition survey at least every five years, with more frequent surveys where concerns arise. Maintained schools had their last survey in 2023.



The board's strategic oversight

Governing boards are not expected to manage repairs day to day, but they do need to maintain strategic oversight. Boards should understand the latest condition survey findings, ensure urgent health and safety risks are addressed, agree priorities and funding, and monitor actions through to completion.

For maintained schools, this includes ensuring that delegated budgets provide for routine repairs and maintenance, while planning ahead for larger works. Decisions should take account of safety, the severity and likely progression of defects, disruption to education, value for money and the whole-life cost of the asset.

Academy trusts should follow their trust's own estates arrangements and escalation routes.

Where to seek help

For maintained schools, **OCC Property and Assets** colleagues can advise on condition surveys, capital priorities and the correct route for school-funded works.

Schools can also use **OCC Health and Safety** guidance and support for compliance questions.

Your Headteachers and School Business Managers should all have contact details for these teams.

[DfE: Good estate management for schools](#)

Boards may wish to ask:

- When was our most recent condition survey, and is it still current?
- Which items present the greatest safety, compliance or operational risk?
- Who owns each action, what is the timescale and how is progress reported?
- How are priorities reflected in the school's asset plan, risk register and three-to-five-year budget plan?
- Are statutory checks, maintenance records and evidence of completed works readily available?

Find out more at our **FREE Briefing** for maintained school governors.

This will be led by the OCC Property Team.

Strategic Oversight of School Estates

Wednesday 11 November 16:00-17:30

Click here to book: [GovernorHub](#)

SEND: from oversight to early action

As SEND reform places greater emphasis on early help and inclusive mainstream provision, governing boards have an important role in keeping inclusion central to school strategy.

Governors don't need to be SEND specialists or manage provision, but they should be assured that needs are identified early, barriers are addressed and resources are improving pupils' experiences and outcomes. Current legal duties remain unchanged, and the [DfE SEN and disability duties: guidance for school governing boards](#) is a helpful starting point.

Oxfordshire schools can also benefit from **Experts at Hand**, which brings education and health expertise—including educational psychologists and specialist teachers—closer to mainstream settings. The offer supports earlier action and more inclusive practice without waiting for a diagnosis, with current support including free assistant educational psychologist intervention packages and peer-support groups for SEND and inclusion staff.

[DfE Experts at Hand: what parents of children and young people with special educational needs need to know](#)

Boards may wish to ask how the school is using this support, what difference it is making to staff confidence and pupil provision, and how learning is being embedded across the school.

Effective oversight should look beyond the number of pupils on the SEND register though. Boards need a rounded view of attendance, exclusions, progress, participation, transitions and the experiences of pupils and families. They should also understand whether the SENCO has sufficient time, status and access to leaders, whether staff can adapt teaching effectively, and how SEND funding and wider resources are being used.

NGA resource

As NGA members, all our maintained schools can use the SEND governance



You can use the monitoring and evaluation tool to structure discussion around legal duties, staff capacity, the SEND policy and information report, engagement with families, use of resources and pupil outcomes. The tool can be found here:

[NGA SEND governance monitoring tool](#)

Useful questions for the board:

- How do we know that pupils' needs are being identified and supported early?
- What does inclusive, high-quality teaching look like across our school, and how do leaders assure themselves that it is consistent?
- What do attendance, suspension, attainment and progress information tell us about pupils with SEND?
- How are pupils and families involved in shaping and reviewing support?
- How is the school using local specialist support, including Experts at Hand, and what evidence shows that it is helping?

Being a critical friend: confidence through evidence

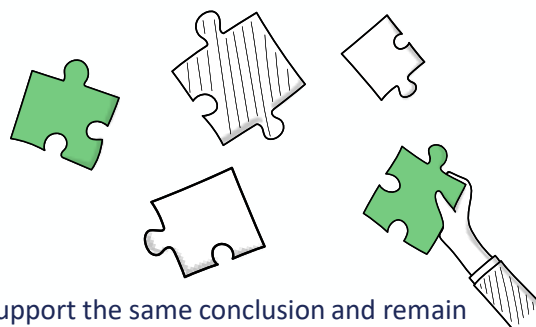
A governing board's role is often summarised through its three core functions: setting strategic direction, holding leaders to account and overseeing financial performance. Across all three sits a simple but essential question: **How do we know?**

How does the board know that its priorities are leading to improvement, that support for vulnerable pupils is effective, that safeguarding arrangements are working or that resources are being used well?

The answer should rarely be "because we were told". Effective governance depends on assurance: reliable evidence from a variety of sources that enables governors to test what they hear, understand risk and make informed decisions.

No single report or monitoring visit provides the whole picture. Strong boards triangulate information from a range of sources, including:

- leadership reports
- performance data
- governor monitoring
- stakeholder feedback
- audits
- external reviews and
- professional advice.



They look for patterns, consider whether different sources support the same conclusion and remain curious when they do not.

This matters because governance is not judged by the volume of activity, but by its impact.

During an Ofsted inspection, governors may be asked about the school's priorities, its key challenges, the progress being made and the evidence underpinning their conclusions. Inspectors may also review minutes to understand how the board has fulfilled its three core functions; where governors have explored an issue, tested assumptions, offered support, provided challenge and followed up agreed actions.

The governance professional's role

Supporting the board

The governance professional (clerk) works with the chair and school leaders to build purposeful agendas, keeping the board focused on its strategic responsibilities and bringing forward the right information at the right time.

Clear, effective minutes capture how governors gained assurance: the questions asked, evidence considered, challenge and support provided, decisions made and actions that followed.

Why the record matters

This record helps the board maintain oversight, follow through on decisions and demonstrate the impact of its work.

Over time, it creates a coherent narrative of how governors have used evidence to fulfil their responsibilities, rather than simply recording a series of meetings.

A fit-for-purpose governing board is not one that knows everything. It is one that can explain how it reached its conclusions, what evidence it considered and what it did as a result.

Because effective governance is not measured by activity. It is measured by impact.

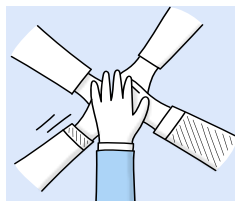
Shared work, collective responsibility

Governance is a collective responsibility, but how well does that work in practice? Clear roles and thoughtful delegation help spread the workload, while keeping the whole board connected to its priorities and accountable for its decisions. The questions below offer a starting point for reviewing how your board shares that responsibility.

THE BIG QUESTION

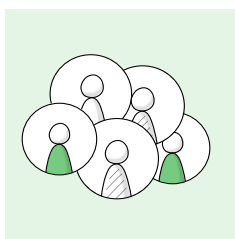
HOW EFFECTIVELY DOES THE BOARD SHARE RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOVERNANCE?

These five questions can help shape a focused and impactful discussion at your first governing board meeting of the year.



SHARING THE LOAD

Is governance shared well across the board, or are too many responsibilities falling to too few people?



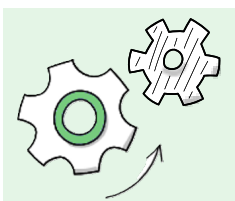
KNOWING OUR ROLES

Are governors clear about their individual and collective responsibilities, including what is delegated and what remains with the full board?



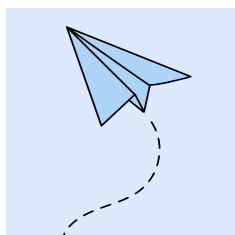
MAKING DELEGATION COUNT

Is the work of committees and link governors clearly connected to the board's strategic priorities?



KEEPING ACCOUNTABILITY STRONG

Is delegation helping the board work effectively, or are there gaps, overlaps or bottlenecks to address?



FROM DELEGATION TO DECISION-MAKING

How does the board maintain oversight of delegated work and ensure that it informs the decisions of the full governing board?



Taking the time to explore these questions will help your board to ensure that individual contributions add up to effective collective governance.