

Governing for Impact

AUTUMN TERM
2026
6th November
Issue 3

THIS ISSUE'S FOCUS

BUILDING RESILIENCE

Strengthening governance and preparing schools for whatever comes next

Welcome back

Welcome to our third autumn governor newsletter. Here we consider how strong foundations and thoughtful planning help school communities build resilience.

Together, the priorities explored in this edition support sustainable leadership and schools where everyone can thrive, now and in the future.

Thank you for the dedication and commitment you bring to governance in Oxfordshire. We hope you find useful and practical ideas to support your board's work this autumn.

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OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Wellbeing matters: supporting staff and ourselves

Wellbeing is central to effective governance, and it is boards that have a strategic role in ensuring staff health, safety and welfare. This includes staff having manageable workloads and a healthy balance between work and personal life. While the headteacher will operationally support the staff here, with the board's oversight, it is the board that supports their headteacher's wellbeing and workload.

- How do we ensure the voices of staff, governors and clerks inform our understanding of wellbeing and shape our priorities?
- How do our strategic decisions, expectations and governance practices support manageable workloads and protect wellbeing?
- What evidence gives us assurance that our approach to wellbeing is making a difference, and where further action is needed?

Governors don't manage wellbeing day to day.

Instead, thoughtful questions about working practices, workload and culture help maintain strategic oversight. Staff surveys, absence and turnover can inform discussions, provided the information is considered in context.

The DfE's Staff Wellbeing Toolkit and Workload Reduction Toolkit offer practical resources, including guidance on reviewing governance activity to identify what could be prioritised, streamlined or stopped.

And what about governor and clerk wellbeing?

Governance can be demanding too. The NAGAS Governance Workload and Wellbeing Toolkit 2026 recognises pressures such as unclear boundaries, duplicated work and difficult decisions or conversations.

Its message is reassuring: sustainable governance is not about doing more but focusing on what matters most and helping everyone contribute their time and energy effectively. Some of the reflective questions in the toolkit may be good starting points in your boards to support governor and clerk wellbeing or to check in on where your board is currently.

The toolkit explores five themes:

01 clear roles and boundaries

02 workload and efficiency

03 emotional load and risk

04 early warning and wellbeing checks

05 culture, recognition and sustainability

Our new **School Staff Wellbeing** training session on **Thursday 3 December, 7.00pm to 8.00pm**, offers an opportunity to explore wellbeing, resilience, workload and the board's role in supporting a positive culture with Education People Services.
Book through GovernorHub or email GovernorTraining@Oxfordshire.gov.uk. The session is free for training package subscribers; non-subscribers can attend on a paid basis, with pricing details available here.

Together, we can reflect on one important question: does the way we govern help create a sustainable, supportive culture for staff, leaders, clerks and governors?

NEW! The inclusive mainstream fund (IMF)

What governors need to know

The Inclusive Mainstream Fund (IMF) helps mainstream schools strengthen inclusive practice so that more pupils have their needs met earlier. It supports a stronger universal offer and removes barriers to learning and participation. For governors, the focus is on understanding barriers to learning, supporting evidence-informed investment and checking its impact.

What funding is available?

2026/27 funding: £3,000 lump sum per school, plus funding based on pupil numbers and low prior attainment.

This is for use alongside core funding, including your notional SEN budget.

What is the funding intended to achieve?

The priority is a stronger **universal offer**: high-quality teaching and whole-school practice to overcome barriers to learning and participation.

Activities must be evidence-informed and align with the DfE's seven inclusion principles.

In year one, the DfE recommends most schools strengthen their universal offer through focus on a few impactful activities.

Seven principles of inclusion

1. Ambitious leadership and governance that embeds inclusion.
2. Evidence-based support prioritising early intervention.
3. High-quality adaptive teaching and a curriculum designed for all learners.
4. Accessible enrichment beyond the classroom.
5. A safe, respectful culture supporting belonging, attendance and participation.
6. Strong partnerships with families and wider services.
7. Inclusive environments and improving accessibility.

31 December 2026

Inclusion strategy must be published on the school website by this date

Developing and publishing the strategy is a grant condition and a template for this is available from the DfE. School leaders should develop the strategy with governors' input. It must set out funded activities and budgeted costs, with clear, realistic, measurable outcomes. A multi-year strategy is permitted, but it must be reviewed annually.

Governors' actions

SCRUTINISE AND APPROVE	Contribute to priorities, challenge spending and outcomes, and approve the strategy before publication.
PUBLISH AND MONITOR	Ensure website publication by the deadline, then monitor impact and review annually.

Inclusive mainstream fund: best practice for schools - GOV.UK

Developing an inclusion strategy using the inclusive mainstream fund - GOV.UK

Planning today for stronger governance tomorrow

Growing and maintaining an effective board involves two complementary strands:

- **succession planning** to develop future leaders
- **targeted recruitment** to address gaps in skills and aptitudes.

Together, they support continuity, share responsibility and bring fresh perspectives to governance.

Succession planning

means nurturing the governors you already have, helping them build the confidence, skills and experience to become lead governors, committee chairs, chairs or vice-chairs. Preparing colleagues before key members step down makes transitions smoother and helps sustain effective leadership.

For succession planning, start by reviewing terms of office and talking openly about future responsibilities. Offer mentoring, training, shadowing and opportunities to chair discussions or committees.

Encouragement and a supportive introduction can help governors feel ready to take the next step.

Recruitment

complements this by bringing in people whose skills and aptitudes meet the board's identified needs. Both strands deserve a regular place on the agenda: who are we helping to grow into leadership, and what gaps do we need to address through recruitment?

For recruitment, refresh your skills audit to identify gaps in skills and aptitudes, then look beyond familiar networks. Explore **Boards for Education** (Boards for Education), **Reach Volunteering** (Reach Volunteering | Connecting people, skills and great causes) and the **DfE's Teaching Vacancies service** (Teaching, leadership and support jobs - Teaching Vacancies - GOV.UK), alongside local employers and community networks, to attract people who can meet those needs.

OCC Governor Services' recruitment webpage brings together recruitment ideas, election and appointment guidance, details of the local authority governor appointment process, eligibility information and an induction checklist. Work with your Governance Professional or Clerk to use these resources and follow the appropriate process for each vacancy: Governor Services Recruitment Information.

Planning ahead turns change into opportunity, helping your board build strong, sustainable governance for children now and in the years ahead.

Is your school ready for a changing climate?

Extreme heat. Heavy rain. Strong winds. What does a changing climate mean for the way we govern our schools?

For some schools, climate resilience became very real this summer.

During June's extreme heat, schools closed, finished early or altered their day as buildings struggled with high temperatures. As autumn and winter bring heavy rain, high winds and flooding, the challenge changes, but the question remains: **how resilient is your school to a changing climate?**

From having a plan to using it

Climate action can easily become associated with recycling, switching off lights or planting trees. Those actions matter, but the strategic challenge is much broader. Schools need to reduce their environmental impact and prepare their buildings, grounds, operations and communities for changing conditions.

The Department for Education identifies four areas for climate action: **decarbonisation; adaptation and resilience; biodiversity; and climate education and green careers.** For boards, this connects directly with familiar responsibilities around strategy, risk, estates, finance and business continuity.

Recent weather shows why adaptation matters. Buildings and grounds may need to cope with hotter classrooms, heavier rainfall, flooding and disruption to travel or operations.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE

DON'T OVERLOOK ADAPTATION

Reducing emissions is important, but schools also need to prepare for the effects of a changing climate. Overheating, flooding and water scarcity can affect buildings, grounds and the school's ability to operate.

FOR BOARDS

Climate resilience belongs alongside the risk register, estate priorities and business-continuity arrangements. Boards should be satisfied that leaders know which parts of the site and which members of the school community may be most vulnerable.

The question is no longer simply, "Do we have a climate action plan?" A more useful question is:
"Is our plan changing what we do?"
Boards do not need to become climate experts, but they should be satisfied that leaders understand the school's environmental impact, have identified climate-related risks and have clear priorities for action.

What next?

01 CHECK YOUR PLAN

Use the DfE whole-setting approach to connect decarbonisation, resilience, biodiversity and climate education.

FOR BOARDS Is the plan informing priorities and decisions?

Sustainability leadership and climate action plans in education - GOV.UK

Environmental sustainability guidance

02 COUNT YOUR CARBON

A free, full-scope calculator for nurseries, schools and colleges. Establish a baseline, identify priorities and track change.

FOR BOARDS Does the board understand the baseline and highest-impact areas?

Home - Count Your Carbon

Action on Carbon and Energy in Schools (ACES) | Oxfordshire Schools

03 ECO-SCHOOLS

Use the seven-step, pupil-led programme to turn ambition into visible environmental action across the school.

FOR BOARDS How does pupil-led action connect with the school's strategic plan?

Explore Eco-Schools →

Eco-Schools Handbook for Climate Resilience & School Safety by FEE International - Flipsnack

A climate action plan should not be another document sitting on a shelf. It should help the school make better decisions about its future.

Considering the impact of our surroundings

Our surroundings can help us do our best or make everyday life more difficult. School buildings and grounds are no exception. Looking beyond routine maintenance gives governors an opportunity to consider how these spaces affect daily school life, recognising what works well and where the environment itself may create barriers.

THE BIG QUESTION

HOW CAN OUR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT HELP PUPILS AND STAFF TO THRIVE?

These five questions can help shape a focused and impactful discussion at your next governing board meeting.



LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS
Do our buildings and outdoor spaces support high-quality teaching, learning and wellbeing for pupils and staff?



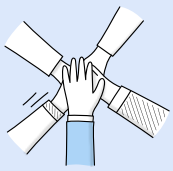
SAFETY & COMPLIANCE
What assurance do governors have that our premises are safe, secure and fit for purpose for everyone who uses them?



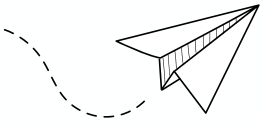
CLIMATE RESILIENCE
How prepared are our buildings and grounds for the impacts of extreme weather and a changing climate?



SUSTAINABILITY
How can improvements to our estate reduce costs, strengthen resilience and support environmental sustainability?



INCLUSION & ACCESSIBILITY
Do our buildings and facilities enable every pupil, staff member and visitor to participate fully in school life?



Taking time to explore these questions will help your board to prioritise improvements to the school environment that support learning, working and wellbeing