

School governors and trustees say they are prepared for COVID impact

Governing schools in the immediate response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) crisis meant rapidly adapting to new challenges, governors and trustees say.

While they are uncertain about the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on pupil outcomes, mental health and well-being, governors and trustees said they were confident in their ability to continue to monitor and address these as part of their governance role.

[A study from Ofsted and the National Governance Association \(NGA\)](#) shows that the business of governing has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the support provided to governing boards to address the challenges posed by COVID-19 has varied depending on school and area, governors and trustees said.

The research explores the views of governors and trustees in the months during lockdown when schools were closed to most pupils. It looks at how those governing responded to COVID-19, as well as the longer-term challenges they face as all pupils return to school.

Governors and trustees said they had adopted new ways of working to respond to a fast-moving situation. This included delegating decisions to governing board chairs and setting up dedicated committees for COVID-19-related issues. Online tools and apps have been pivotal in enabling the work of governance to continue. While some governors and trustees felt that online meetings had drawbacks, others said that online tools could hold benefits for the future, potentially helping to recruit from a more diverse pool of governors and trustees.

The level of support provided to governors varied from school to school, from trust to trust, and across different areas, the report shows. Governors and possibly heads in multi-academy trusts (MATs) tended to feel better supported by the trust in their decisions than schools not in a MAT, although there was much variation in which decisions were delegated to academy level. Some governors relied on informal networks of schools where support wasn't available.

Responding to the pandemic, governors said their priorities were:

Catching up on missed learning and children's mental health and well-being: governors felt confident they would be able to monitor pupil progress and hold heads to account without exam data from September. But they warned of longer-term challenges in monitoring the progress of pupils who have fallen behind while not in school, and who weren't already identified as being in need before schools closed.

Inequality of access to digital technology and the varying quality of online education: the sudden introduction of remote and online learning raised concerns for several governors about equal access to online technologies and the quality of remote learning. Schools are at different stages in establishing online remote education, but governors suggested that greater oversight of the quality of that learning and pupil access was vital.

Some governors and trustees said that they were concerned about how long it would take for pupils to catch up and the long-term impact of school closure on different groups of children. Many were reconsidering their strategic plans to take the impact of school closures into account. Most governors and trustees felt that adjustments, including changes to the curriculum, would need to be made over the next academic year.

Amanda Spielman, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, said:

Strong governance is good for schools and their pupils. The challenge and support that governors and trustees bring will no doubt be even more crucial as schools reopen to all pupils. Children have missed out on a great deal in recent months. Every part of the system must play its part in making the return to school a success.

Emma Knights, chief executive, National Governance Association said:

Governing boards have adapted remarkably well to governing remotely, keeping on top of essential business and responding to a fast-changing landscape. They have been ensuring that senior leaders have robust plans in place to enable the successful further opening of schools while supporting the wellbeing of those executive leaders. Over the coming weeks and months, governors and trustees will be taking great care to understand the impact of partial school closures on all pupils, especially the most disadvantaged, and make sure that resources are used in the best way to enable pupils to recover as quickly as possible.