



Lord Nash

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

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September 2014

Dear Chair,

At the start of this new academic year I want to thank you directly for the vital role you play as the chair of governors/ trustees in overseeing the success of your school.

There's never been a better or more important time to serve as a governor to help improve children's lives and give them the best possible education. So I celebrate the work of governors. But I am particularly grateful to you as a chair for carrying the additional responsibility of leading and ensuring the effectiveness of your school's governance arrangements.

As the Minister responsible for school governance, I am writing to highlight my priorities and the support we are offering in 2014-15 to help you establish and maintain a professional standard of governance to drive improvement in your school.

As chair, you have a vital role in keeping governance focused on three core strategic functions – setting vision, ethos and strategic direction; holding your school leaders to account for the performance of pupils and the performance management of staff; and ensuring your school's finances are well spent.

These functions are defined in [law](#) and explained in the [Governors' Handbook](#). They are strategic in nature, highlighting the need for you and other governors to avoid being drawn into operational day-to-day matters – for which you should hold school leaders to account. A strong understanding of and focus on these core functions is essential and should underpin all aspects of governance, including your structures, the skills you look for and develop in your governors, and how you prioritise your time.

To build and maintain an effective board you will be aiming to recruit, induct and continuously develop high calibre governors with relevant skills and experience. As chair of governors it is your job to set high expectations of governors' role and conduct. You should ensure each governor understands their role and is making an active and valuable contribution.

When recruiting governors your focus should be on finding people with the necessary skills. Please make full use of the free service from [SGOSS Governors for Schools](#) which is funded by us to help you find the skilled governors you need. We have also worked with a range of partners to launch the [Inspiring Governors Alliance](#) to increase

both the supply of and demand for high calibre governors – including by promoting the benefits to individuals and to employers of supporting staff to be governors.

It is also important to make sure your governors and clerk undertake as necessary appropriate high quality induction and ongoing training and development. Most governors will recognise the need for and be willing to undertake suitable training. Some, however, may not. A misunderstanding of the nature of their role or lack of skills to deliver it effectively may lead to a governor bringing the governing body into disrepute or acting outside of the professional ethos I would expect you to maintain. Should this occur, the governor may be suspended from their duties while the situation is addressed.

Please make the most of the recently expanded range of free and subsidised [training available from NCTL](#). This includes training workshops for governors on some specific priority topics and a new training programme for clerks. It also includes a chair of governors' leadership development programme. I would very much encourage you to consider joining this programme, if you have not already done so, to add further insight to your work as a chair. The programme is also open to aspiring chairs to help you with succession planning given the benefits of chairs moving on after a reasonable time to share their experience and expertise with other schools. In 2014-15 we are funding scholarships of up to £320 towards the typical £399 cost of the programme.

NCTL also provides a number of free resources, including a recently updated publication, [Leading Governors](#), specifically for chairs.

At times, you may need expert support on a specific or significant challenge. We continue to fund the free [Governorline](#) advice service, and have now appointed around 300 [National Leaders of Governance](#) to provide chairs with free peer support.

In the same way that you strive to deliver the best possible education for your pupils you will also be striving to offer the best possible governance for your school. It is your role to lead by example, to encourage within the governing body a culture of self-review with regular evaluation of the impact of the governing body, of individual governors, and of yourself as chair. This will help you to reflect on whether the board's constitution and membership is fit for purpose, and identify whether you need to re-structure or recruit to address any identified gaps or weaknesses. An opportunity for such reflection will be created for many by the requirement we have placed on all maintained schools to be constituted under the recently revised 2012 Constitution Regulations by September 2015, having regard to new [statutory guidance](#).

This kind of reflection and self-evaluation is also crucial for academy trust boards, especially for those who have recently converted to academy status. In fact, we now require all new converters to commission a review of their governance arrangements and report to us on the changes they have made to ensure they are fit for their new purpose. If you chair a multi-academy trust board, as you keep your governance structures under review, you should be aware of new flexibilities we are introducing for local governing bodies to oversee more than one academy (the benefits of which are discussed further below).

We recently held workshops to look at how to approach reconstitution. A summary of

the key points raised by participants, who were from a range of backgrounds, have been summarised in the form of a possible process road map, which is available on the [NCOGS website](#).

If Ofsted judge your school's governance to be ineffective, you should be aware that inspectors will recommend that you commission an external review of governance. In these circumstances, it is vital that you commission a high quality review from an expert in line with [guidance](#) from NCTL, and that you develop and act swiftly to implement a SMART action plan for improvement.

Finally, your leadership of the board means you have a vital role in shaping the school's long term vision for the future. This includes decisions about academy status and about your relationship with other schools. Governance structures spanning more than one school can have significant benefits, including giving the board a more strategic perspective and the ability to compare and contrast between schools to create even more robust accountability. I believe these benefits are greatest in an academy context. NCTL has published resources on governance in [federations](#) and in [multi-academy trusts](#).

I hope you will take the time to look into and benefit from the support and resources I have highlighted, and that this in turn helps you deliver the best possible governance for the benefit of your pupils. One opportunity to celebrate high quality governance is through the [National Governors' Association](#) Outstanding Governance awards; nominations for the 2015 awards are now open.

Thank you again for your significant contribution to our education system. I wish you and your school all the very best for the year ahead.

Yours sincerely,



JOHN NASH