



GST Newsletter

Issue 11, January 2025

Introduction

Welcome back to another new term and a new year, already looking forward to seeing the first signs of Spring, spot the snowdrops!

If governors would like to refer to any information in previous newsletters, please visit the [Governor Support Team \(GST\) website](#).

News/Updates

As well as the Department for Education (DfE) [School Governance](#) update, below are further items which may be of interest:

Prime Minister announces Plan for Change

The Prime Minister has set out the milestones for how government aim to deliver on its national missions through a [Plan for Change](#).

The opportunity mission aims to break the link between a child's background and their future success, delivering across four key areas: setting every child up for the best start in life; helping every child to achieve and thrive at school; building skills for opportunity and growth; and building family security.

Progress will be measured through a [series of milestones](#) including Early Years Foundation Stage assessment, attainment at the end of secondary school, and the proportion of young people in education or employment with training, and achieving higher level qualifications.

Association of Colleges (AoC) conference: working together to shape the future skills system

Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, spoke at the 2024 annual conference of the AoC in Birmingham about [working together to shape the future skills system](#).

The Skill's Minister, Baroness Jacqui Smith's also delivered a [keynote speech](#) at the conference.

Education Minister speech at Schools and Academies Show 2024

Education Minister, Catherine McKinnell's address at the Schools and Academies Show in Birmingham, which included the launch of [Plan Technology for Your School](#). A new digital service to help schools make strategic decisions about where and how to improve their technology.

Ultimately, this is about making sure that the rapid expansion of technology does not create a two-tier system of those who benefit, and those who continue to struggle.

A transcript of the full address can be found [here](#).



Academies: making significant changes or closure by agreement

[Guidance](#) for academy trusts planning to make organisational changes or close an academy by mutual agreement with the Secretary of State.

DfE Filtering and monitoring updates

The DfE has [updated the filtering and monitoring standards](#) for schools and colleges. The updates include an emphasis on the responsibility of governing bodies and proprietors to ensure appropriate systems are in place, a more comprehensive assessment of student risk profiles, ensuring bring your own devices have appropriate filtering and monitoring and a clarification of in-person monitoring.

[This article](#) by the UK Safer Internet Centre provides more details about the updates.

Exam changes announced

Exam boards will be required to provide students with formulae and equations sheets for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027. Specifically, [Ofqual's updated conditions](#) will require exam boards to:

- Publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2025 in December 2024 so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- Publish the formulae and equations sheets for the exams in 2026 and 2027 by 1 September 2025 and 1 September 2026 respectively so that students may become familiar with them before the exams
- Provide clean copies with their 2025, 2026 and 2027 exam papers.

Ofqual has decided to implement these changes following [a recent consultation](#) where the majority of respondents (94%) were in favour of students being given formulae sheets for GCSE mathematics and equations sheets for physics and combined science (95%).

Beyond this timeline, DfE will confirm any further changes following the [Curriculum and Assessment Review](#).

Bett survey: The growing role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education in 2024

79% of teachers think AI will not be able to replace teaching skills, and a further 62% believe that AI will make academic cheating more difficult to detect. These are the latest findings revealed by a [Bett survey](#) on the use of AI in education.

For schools that have adopted AI, the main goal has been to reduce teacher workload, with a quarter of educators citing this as the primary reason. Other motivations revealed by the survey include enhancing student performance (11%), evaluating student assignments (9%), and identifying areas where students require additional support (5%).

The report highlighted the necessity for more thorough training and knowledge about AI's potential and its constraints as 34% reported receiving no training at all.

Government Guidance Artificial Intelligence

The DfE (under the previous government) produced a policy paper on the use of [Generative AI in education](#).

The DfE writes 'AI technology is not new and we already use it in everyday life. This creates opportunities and challenges for the education sector.' The guidance has a section looking at protecting data, pupils and staff.

As a governing board you may want to watch National Governance Associations ((NGA) [Navigating AI: Essentials for school governance](#) – this on-demand webinar explains how AI can support decision-making, improve educational outcomes, and enhance governance processes.

Data protection in schools

The policies and processes schools and multi-academy trusts need to protect personal data and respond effectively to a personal data breach.

This [toolkit](#) will help school staff, governors and trustees:

- Understand how to comply with data protection law
- Develop their data policies and processes
- Know what staff and pupil data to keep
- Follow good practices for preventing personal data breaches.

Safer Internet Day - Tuesday 11th February 2025

Safer Internet Day is coming up fast. The theme for this year's Safer Internet Day is 'Too good to be true? Protecting yourself and others from scams online'.

Questions being considered:

- How is changing technology like generative AI going to impact the approach of scammers?
- What role can the government and internet industry take to tackle this threat?
- What changes would young people like to see to help protect themselves moving forward?

You can find more information and resources about Safer Internet Day [here](#).

Education Policy Institute (EPI) report: Tackling the persistent disadvantage gap

A [new report](#) by the EPI reveals that persistently disadvantaged pupils - eligible for free school meals 80% or more of their school years - are on average two years behind their peers.

As the current funding system does not distinguish between persistent and short-term disadvantage, EPI recommends that the government invest £640 million to support these pupils, suggesting that this could be achieved by redistributing funds from falling pupil numbers. This would assist in closing the attainment gap and ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed.

When it comes to addressing the needs of disadvantaged pupils, boards are encouraged to look beyond viewing eligibility for pupil premium as the only indicator of disadvantage, and to consider other factors, (e.g. poverty, SEND etc).

As a board you may find the following resources useful:

- NGA - [Spotlight on disadvantage: pupil premium research](#)
- NGA - [Disadvantage 360: Widening the lens](#), webinar.

Disadvantaged pupils disproportionately more likely to experience suspension or exclusion

[Analysis by FFT Education Datalab](#) of 2022/23 and 2023/24 attendance data shows a rise in suspensions and exclusions across all year groups, from reception to year 11. The combined rate increased from 9.4% to 11.2% last year.

The report highlights that disadvantaged pupils are disproportionately more likely than others to experience suspension or exclusion. The rate has increased across all year groups, with nearly one in five disadvantaged pupils in years 9 and 10 being suspended or excluded at least once in the last academic year.

Effective behaviour management is fundamental to creating supportive, safe and inclusive learning environments. All schools are required to have a behaviour policy that supports effective behaviour management.

The DfE's [guidance on behaviour in schools](#) sets out a whole school approach to behaviour where high standards and expectations run through all aspects of school life. [Monitor your school attendance: user guide](#), guidance for schools, academy trusts and Local Authorities (LA) on using the monitor school attendance tool.

£740 million allocated to create SEND places in mainstream schools

[£740 million capital investment](#) has been set aside by the government to adapt classrooms to be more accessible for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and to create specialist facilities to deliver more targeted support.

Additionally, a new Neurodivergence Task and Finish Group are working with the DfE to help to increase understanding of inclusion and support for children with neurodivergence in mainstream education.

Forming part of a broader £6.7 billion capital settlement for education for the next financial year, the measures aim to improve upon data that revealed only 20% of pupils with SEND met the expected standards in reading, writing and maths at Key Stage 2 level last year.

Speaking on the announcement, Education Secretary Bridget Phillipson said Labour's commitment to reforms "could not be clearer" and that "building a system where more children with SEND can attend mainstream schools is central to our plans".

New research: The cost of school meals debt

School meal debt has risen by 50% over two years, largely impacting families just above the Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility threshold. This is according to new research published by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG), highlighting the challenges schools face in implementing a means-tested school meal system.

Other key findings include:

- Managing means-tested systems is complex, involving FSM registration, payment monitoring, and debt management.
- Primary and SEND schools reported an average dinner money debt of £1,000 at the end of 2023/24, with some schools reporting as much as £22,000.
- Schools are adopting various strategies to mitigate debt, but these challenges strain budgets, relationships, and pupil experiences.

Read the full report here: [The Cost of School Meal Debt](#).

Suggested NGA Learning Link module, [A whole school approach to food](#).

Establishing school-based nursery provision

The DfE have updated their [non-statutory guidance](#) for schools, responsible bodies and childcare providers looking to open or expand school-based nursery provision to clarify, that if school-based provision is exempt from registering with Ofsted or a childminding agency, it must still comply with the compulsory requirements of the childcare register.

Over £2 billion boost to secure expansion in early education

Early years providers are set to benefit from over [£2 billion extra investment](#) compared to last year, to support the rollout of 30 hours of government-funded early education from next September.

This forms part of the government's mission to break the unfair link between background and opportunity, increasing access to affordable and high-quality early education so tens of thousands more children will be 'school ready' at age 5 by the end of the parliament.

While welcomed by the sector, concerns have been raised that the funding may not fully cover increased costs, potentially leading to closures and exacerbating the staffing crisis.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024: policy summary

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill aims to change the law to better protect children and raise standards in education. DfE have produced a summary of the bill which can be found [here](#).

Keeping children safe, helping families thrive

The government have produced a [policy statement](#) setting out their commitment to whole system reform of the children's social care system.

The safeguarding network have produced a [summary](#) of the policy which you may find useful.

Children with complex needs who are deprived of liberty

Research commissioned by the DfE and NHS England, to better understand how to support [children with complex needs who are deprived of liberty](#).

The full report, including an executive summary can be found [here](#).

Flexible working in schools

The DfE have updated their [non-statutory guidance](#) for employers and staff who want to consider or make arrangements for flexible working.

Gatsby Benchmarks Updated

The Gatsby Foundation have published updated '[Gatsby Benchmarks for good careers' guidance](#). Following a review of the benchmarks ten years after their initial release, the report explores what good careers guidance looks like now and how schools and trusts can deliver careers guidance for the next ten years.

[Read the NGA's guidance](#) on how your board can meet its statutory duties relating to careers guidance, by supporting and challenging your school or trust to meet the Gatsby Benchmarks.

Academies land and buildings collection tool (LBCT)

Academy trusts and diocesan users deadline for the submission of their LBCT has now passed. Guidance is available [here](#).

If you have any questions about the LBCT, contact the [customer help portal](#). Alternatively you can also [try the new virtual assistant](#) to help resolve any queries you may have about the LBCT.

Anti-bullying culture

As part of Anti-Bullying Week (11 to 15 November 2024), with the theme of respect, the Anti-Bullying Alliance released a [summary](#) of the findings of its pupil [bullying](#) and well-being questionnaire for 2023-2024.

The questionnaire found:

- 72% said they had experienced some form of bullying.
- 23% said they were frequently being bullied.
- 29% of pupils with SEND and those in receipt of free school meals said they had experienced frequent bullying.

Pupils are not the only ones who experience bullying at school. To create a strong anti-bullying culture all year round, we must tackle bullying at all levels, including education staff. Education Support has created [a toolkit](#) that provides support and advice about how to recognise bullying in the workplace, what to do if it's happening to you, and how education settings can create a culture that supports the well-being of everyone.

Copyright licences for state schools in England

[DfE guidance on copyright licences](#) and how copyright affects schools.

The DfE buys copyright licences for all state-funded primary and secondary schools in England – covering schools for almost all their copyright requirements.

Your school leadership (head and board) needs to make sure that:

- All intended activities are covered adequately by the licences
- All staff follow the terms and conditions.

For more information on what content can be used, and how to gain other permissions, contact the relevant organisation from the link.

Further education (FE) corporations and sixth-form college corporations: governance guide

DfEs [Governance Guide](#) that outlines the legal and regulatory requirements and recommended practice that apply to FE and sixth-form college corporations.

OFSTED

Sir Martyn Oliver's speech at the 2024 National Children and Adult Services Conference

Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted's Chief Inspector, spoke at the annual National Children and Adult Services Conference (NCASC) in Liverpool.

A transcript of the speech can be found [here](#).

Ofsted Academy

The [Ofsted Academy](#) has provided [access](#) to Ofsted's training, learning and professional development publications.

Independent review of artificial intelligence in education: terms of reference

The government has asked Ofsted to carry out an independent [review](#) of artificial AI in education.

Ofsted publishes Big Listen action monitoring report and announces trials of new inspection approach

Ofsted has published the first [monitoring report](#) on 132 commitments made in the Big Listen and the [response](#) to Dame Christine Gilbert's independent learning review.

Ofsted have also [announced](#) a trial of a new approach to education inspection in the first week of the new term, with visits to a small number of volunteer schools. These visits will informally test elements of the proposed inspection framework, which Ofsted will publish for consultation later in January.

Reminders

National School Governors' Awareness Day (NSGAD)

NSGAD is an opportunity to recognise the impact, celebrate the commitment, and highlight the vital role governors/trustees play in shaping education.

NSGAD will be held on **13th February 2025**. Please visit the [Governors for schools](#) website for further resources and information of events they are holding.

As a LA, we would like to pass on our appreciation and thanks to all who volunteer, governors/trustees/local academy committee members (LACM) and associate members, for this important role which contributes to improving the outcomes for all children and young people of Westmorland and Furness.

Below are some links to resources which you may find helpful in the sourcing and recruitment of governors/trustees/LACM and associate members:

- Westmorland and Furness Council, [Recruitment Poster Template](#), download and adapt to advertise your vacancy in your local community
- Find out more about [The role of school governor](#) and the [benefits](#) of volunteering
- NGA have a [webinar](#) with tips to help you find and retain volunteers.

Finance Audits/Reminders (LA maintained schools)

The Schools Forum received a report last term from the Finance Team with a summary of findings of school audits 2023/24. As a result, we have been asked to provide a few reminders for boards as follows:

Terms of Reference for Committees

Any committee that has been delegated decision making powers must have a terms of reference in place. These need to be agreed/approved at full board level and reviewed on an annual basis.

Deficit Recovery Plans

Where schools have incurred a deficit, they are required to restore the budget to a balanced position within a three year period and to support this with a deficit recovery plan. You may find the [Westmorland & Furness LA Scheme for Financing Schools June 2024](#) useful. See Annex H, Challenge and support process for schools and pupil referral units with a deficit budget, which includes an example Deficit Recovery Plan.

Policy of Financial Delegation

The Policy of Financial Delegation is important as it sets out governors' and management's expectations in relation to the delegation of financial responsibilities. The arrangements for delegation should clearly specify the limit(s) upon the authority delegated to individuals, and the circumstances in which a decision must be taken by the governing body. The Policy of Financial Delegation should be approved by board/committee and reviewed on an annual basis, this should be evidenced in the minutes of the relevant board/committee meeting.

The Finance Team have provided a Policy of Financial Delegation model, this can be found in the Clerks (Governance Professionals) Handbook, Appendix 19, on the [GST website](#).

Declaration of Interests

Governors and staff must avoid any conflict between their business/personal interests and the interests of the school. All schools audited had a register of interests in place, but these were not always complete and up to date.

Reminder that declarations should be completed annually, templates for completion can be found in the Clerks (Governance Professionals) Handbook, Appendix 9 and 10, on the [GST website](#). As best practice, if an individual has no declarations, record a nil return as evidence that a return has been completed.

Counter fraud and whistleblowing policies

Schools are required to have whistleblowing/fraud policies that are regularly reviewed and approved (evidence in board minutes) by the governing board.

You may find the NGAs article on [Focusing on fraud prevention: protecting school funds](#) useful.

Operational Financial Procedures

Boards must ensure that an adequate and effective system of financial controls is operated and regularly reviewed. This includes having adequate and up-to-date written descriptions of all financial systems and procedures.

You may find the NGAs webinar on [Financial oversight in challenging times](#) useful.

School Fund

It is important that school funds are administered in accordance with statutory requirements and to a similar standard as those applicable to the Council generally. As part of the audits below are some examples of issues identified:

- There was no evidence to show that that an annual statement of School Fund accounts had been prepared
- The accounts had not been independently audited on an annual/timely basis
- Where the accounts were being audited, the board had not been provided with a copy of the audited statement of accounts for information or there was no evidence in the minutes that this had taken place
- The auditor of the School Fund was a governor, so not sufficiently independent
- Sources of income in the School Fund were not always sufficiently detailed
- Income relating to the school's delegated budget was being paid into the School Fund bank account and this was not always promptly transferred to the Council's bank account. Ideally relevant income should be paid direct to the Council's bank account rather than via the School Fund.

For additional information, advice, questions and guidance please contact the Schools Finance Team, journal.request@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk.

Completing the [Schools financial value standard \(SFVS\)](#) in maintained schools and [School resource management self-assessment checklist \(SRMSAC\)](#) in academy trusts is an important annual task for governing boards. These checks make sure that the organisation is meeting the right standards for good financial health and resource management.

In addition, the following NGA LL modules may be useful:

- [Effective financial governance in schools](#)
- [Using integrated curriculum and financial planning \(ICFP\)](#)

Governance professional perspectives

NGAs [Governance professional perspectives](#) report explores the changing landscape of the governance professional role over the last three years, highlighting the progress made in some areas and the further work required in others.

It sets out a number of recommendations for governors/trustees to consider. Read the report to ensure your board's clerk/governance professional is getting the support they need to help secure effective governance.

Engagement with parents/carers

The [DfE Maintained Schools Governance Guide](#) and [Academy Trust Governance Guide](#) makes clear that an effective governing board builds relationships with parents and other stakeholders to create a sense of trust and shared ownership of the school strategy and its vision.

NGA has worked with Parentkind to create new [parental engagement guidance](#) for governing boards. The new guides have been developed for both multi academy trusts (MATs) and single schools. They explain why parent participation in pupils' learning is important, actions schools and trusts can take, and how boards monitor and support effective parental engagement.

Parentkind also gives those with a parenting role a voice in education. The results of Parentkind's latest [National Parent Survey](#) show what parents across the UK think about issues such as the cost-of-living crisis, mental health and screen time, as well as educational concerns such as school attendance and learning at home.

Development/Training

Reducing and managing complaints to schools

The Learning Improvement Service, in conjunction with the Legal Team, are delivering virtual sessions around Reducing and managing complaints to schools.

These repeated sessions will cover:

- Suggestions around fundamental practices to reduce concerns/complaints
- The legal position of schools when responding to concerns/complaints and how to address these effectively
- How to respond if a complaint is escalated beyond the school
- How to effectively support the children of separated parents who are in conflict and how to appropriately respond to requests/demands from parents in conflict
- There will be an opportunity to ask questions at the end of each session.

Headteachers, governors and trustees are invited to attend.

All sessions will start at 3.45pm and will end by 5:00pm.

There is no need to pre-book, and there is no cost to attend, please just click on the Teams link for your preferred date:

Session Date

Microsoft Teams link for session

Monday 3rd February 2025

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 312 757 088 975
Passcode: VXXV3D

Wednesday 5th February 2025

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 316 158 605 518
Passcode: sWwPiF

New! Introduction to governance

For newly appointed/elected governors, associate members, trustees and LACM as an introduction to their new role to help build confidence, outline expectations of the board and board members, and to consider the next steps in the development of their governance career.

Dates:

Wednesday, 12 February 2025, 5pm to 6.30pm

Thursday, 22 May 2025, 6pm to 7.30pm

New! Looking forward to inspection!

This session outlines the process of an Ofsted Inspection, particularly useful for those who have not yet experienced an inspection. However, may be useful to all governors, trustees and LACM to reflect and consider their involvement and contribution to the process.

Dates:

Thursday, 13 February 2025, 5pm to 6.30pm

Tuesday, 20 May 2025, 6pm to 7.30pm

New! Introduction to the role of governance professional/clerk

For newly appointed Clerks/Governance Professionals as an introduction to their new role to help build confidence, outline expectations, and to consider the next steps in the development of their role.

Dates:

Thursday, 27 February 2025, 5pm to 6.30pm

Tuesday, 3 June 2025, 6pm to 7.30pm

Booking: Places for any of these events can be booked via SLA online.

If you have any issues accessing SLA online, please email the School Development Team at **school.development@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk** to book your place.

Governance Professional/Clerking Cluster

Dates, topics and links below for sessions for the next academic year. No cost for any clerk/governance professional who would like to attend.

Wednesday, 26 February 2025, 5pm to 6.30pm

Focus on governor/associate member/trustee/LACM induction

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 377 475 559 102

Passcode: WGf5PV

Thursday, 5 June 2025, 6pm to 7.30pm

Focus on chairs role and board succession planning

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 351 357 532 43

Passcode: 9hoQ3f.

Chairs Role – Developing Leadership

We are going to be running the above session in the second half of the Spring term. Look out for dates in the next newsletter.

School to school support

Further to our article 'School to School Support' previously, the GST wish to remind any governors/trustees who feel they may be in a position to provide governance support to other boards on a voluntary basis, to contact the GST for an informal conversation.

We would like to extend this invite to include clerks (governance professionals).

Please contact either your Governor Support Assistant or drop an email to GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk to discuss further or if you would just like a little bit more detail.

GST Contact Details

The GST continues to offer advice, support, and guidance, specific to your boards needs and can be contacted as follows:

Jane Lees - Governor Support Assistant

Email: jane.lees@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk or GST.mailbox.WAF@cumbria.gov.uk

Telephone: **01228 226925**

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