



GST Newsletter

Issue 18, March 2026

Introduction

Welcome back to the second half of the Spring Term, although it was quite chilly, we hope you still all managed to have a lovely break.

If you would like to refer back to any information in previous newsletters, please visit the [GST website](#).

News, updates and information

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

Action

Renewal of National Governance Association (NGA) Learning Link eLearning (NGA LL)

Westmorland and Furness Council are pleased to announce that they will continue to fund free access to the NGA LL eLearning platform for the 2026 – 2027 financial year.

Please do take advantage of this fantastic resource to help build and enhance your boards existing skills and knowledge. You will need to register to access the platform, if you have not yet registered, instructions of how to do this and a guide to the platform can be found [here](#).

Sometimes, the biggest challenge can be where to start! NGA LL have provided a suggested pathway covering a governance year, that may help with your development journey. They have separate pathways for the following roles:

- [Maintained school governors](#)
- [Multi Academy Trust Trustees](#)
- [Local academy committee/Local governing board members](#)

All schools

Autumn Term Governance Survey Feedback

Thank you to all who took part in the recent Autumn Term Governance Survey. Although responses were low, your input helps us understand the strengths and areas for development across our schools.



Strengths

- Annual self evaluation: 73% say they complete one each year
- Awareness of NGA LL (free via Westmorland and Furness Local Authority (LA)): 90% are aware
- Stakeholder engagement: of responses received 70% ran stakeholder surveys in the last 12 months; where groups were specified, responses most often included:
 - Parents (86%)
 - Staff (81%)
 - Pupils (71%)
- Committee basics: 67% of (LA maintained) responses operate a committee structure.

Development areas

- Vacancies: 70% of responses reported current vacancies
- Induction & support: While 70% of respondents stated they have an induction programme, only 33% assign a mentor/buddy and 27% run annual governor conversations
- Succession planning: 37% of responses reported active succession planning; 17% of which operate a co chair model and 7% have more than one vice chair
- Headteacher appraisal: of the responses received most conduct appraisal in Autumn (63%); only 30% do a mid term review
- Clerk development: survey responses stated 7% say clerks/governance professionals receive an annual appraisal and 27% have heard of the Westmorland & Furness Clerks' Cluster Group
- Meeting discipline: 60% of responses say papers go out at least 7 days before meetings
- Monitoring: In the last year, 50% of answers received reported 3+ monitoring visits and 27% reported none

Suggested next steps

Strong governance underpins school improvement/development. The results show good progress in some areas, but also highlights gaps, if addressed/developed could contribute towards delivering effective governance to ensure the best outcomes for all children and young people:

- Tackle vacancies: how can you promote your vacancies?
- Strengthen induction: pair every new governor with a mentor and schedule annual governor conversations to support retention. Attend the [Westmorland and Furness Recruitment, Induction and Retention session](#) for suggestions/ideas
- Ensure and support governance leadership roles: set out a simple succession plan.
- Boost clerk support: introduce annual conversations/appraisals and signpost the Westmorland and Furness Clerks' Cluster Group and National Governance Learning Link modules
- Ensure meeting papers are circulated at least 7 days ahead for all meetings.

The Schools White Paper – Every child achieving and thriving

This white paper and accompanying documents set out the government's vision for schools and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) reform to support every child to achieve and thrive.

'Every child achieving and thriving' outlines the governments ambition to improve the lives of all children and young people by:

- Shifting children's school experience from narrow to broad
- Ensuring those who have been sidelined are included
- Taking children and communities from withdrawn to engaging with schools.

The '6,500 additional teachers delivery plan' sets out our plans to recruit 6,500 more teachers and is intended to be read alongside 'Every child achieving and thriving'.

The [SEND reform: putting children and young people first consultation](#) outlines our proposed reforms and asks a series of questions to get the views of everyone with an interest.

The government has also written shorter, simpler documents that [summarise the schools white paper and SEND consultation](#) for parents and those working in the sector and the National Governance Association has also produced a [summary](#) how the proposals will impact governance.

You may find the NGA's latest webinar useful: [What the white paper means for you?](#)

Education Secretary speech at Global Artificial Intelligence Safety Summit

In her [speech](#), the Education Secretary, announced stronger safety measures to be introduced around Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education.

[Guidance](#) on the safety standards for generative AI products and systems developed for use in educational settings, has been updated in line with legal changes to the Online Safety Act and to reflect emerging risks from generative AI.

In addition see the governments [press release](#) about AI powered tutoring tools that will be available to year 9-11 pupils by the end of 2027, benefiting up to 450,000 disadvantaged pupils.

Teacher-led trials of the tools will begin this summer, co-created alongside AI and tech companies.

Explore the governing board's role in tackling educational disadvantage through the National Governance Association [toolkits](#).

Family Routes: exploring the needs and experiences of young people

This [report](#) explores the needs, experiences and outcomes of young people (aged 12 to 25) growing up in adoptive and special guardianship families.

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

[Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges](#) has updated the Filtering and monitoring core and Cyber standards.

Government to drive action to improve children's relationship with mobile phones and social media

The Government conducted a [consultation](#) on children's social media use and bans phones in schools to protect young people's wellbeing and ensure safer online experiences. You can find a report on the findings [here](#).

GCSE outcomes for pupils with EHCPs: comparison of mainstream and special schools

[Analysis](#) of GCSE outcomes for pupils with education, health and care plans comparing those educated in mainstream schools with those in special schools.

Ofqual consultation on regulation of screen assessments for GCSEs, AS and A Levels, closes 5 March 2026

Ofqual is consulting on proposals for [how on-screen assessment should be regulated in GCSEs, AS and A levels](#) in England. This will inform guidance published later this year.

New employer grant to boost quality in early years education

The government has announced a [new employer grant to boost quality in early years education](#) to support and help early years settings strengthen their workforce and improve outcomes for children.

School Support Staff Negotiating Body (SSSNB)

The [SSSNB](#) will be a statutory negotiating body for school support staff. It will negotiate pay and conditions, and advise on training and career progression, has been updated to include the 'School support staff negotiating body' factsheet.

Evaluation of the behaviour hubs programme: final report

The [evaluation of the behaviour hubs programme](#) assesses how effectively, the behaviour hubs programme achieved its strategic aim to improve and sustain behaviour culture and practice in schools.

Resources available:

- Also available is a [collection of existing guidance](#) for schools and multi-academy trusts to support them to improve and maintain high standards of behaviour
- DfE also have their Behaviour hubs virtual training modules which are available to [view via YouTube](#)
- [RISE attendance and behaviour hubs programme](#) guidance for school leaders on the RISE attendance and behaviour hubs programme, its benefits and support, and how to join
- [Regional improvement for standards and excellence \(RISE\)](#), school support available through the RISE programme.

School rebuilding programme, new round of nominations announced

The Education Estates Strategy sets out the government's 10-year plan to improve the education estate in England to deliver a decade of national renewal.

Guidance about the school rebuilding programme, which carries out major rebuilding and refurbishment projects at schools and sixth-form colleges, has been updated to open the programme for a [new round of nominations](#).

In addition, the [Improve and renew: developing your long-term estates plan](#) guidance to help schools and colleges plan, prioritise and deliver estate improvements that address condition, suitability, resilience and decarbonisation, may be of interest.

National Association of Headteachers reports poor mental health among school leaders

The [NAHTs annual poll](#) reports 45% of school leaders required mental health and wellbeing support within a single year and 72% also reported that their role had a negative impact on their mental health over the past 12 months, an increase of 7% compared to last year.

In response to the deterioration in school leaders' health and wellbeing, the NAHT is calling on the government to agree to a universal, fully funded, and ongoing entitlement to professional supervision for all school leaders.

Supporting your leader

Headteachers operate under high pressure, with limited resources and with significant accountability. Governing boards play a vital role in reducing unnecessary stress by promoting healthy working hours and modelling a positive work life balance. Leaders are then better placed to act as role model and to embed the same culture throughout their schools or trusts. Evidence of this should result in:

- Strong recruitment and retention across all staff levels
- Reduced absence linked to stress or mental health issues
- Improved outcomes for pupils.

As a governing board has the following been completed, put in place:

- Headteachers appraisal?
- Has a midyear review been put in place?
- Has the governing board made available resources for the headteachers continual professional development?

NGAs Case for governance report

NGA is approaching their 20th anniversary and have marked the start of their anniversary celebrations with the publication of the [Case for Governance report](#). The report makes an unapologetic case for school and trust governance as an essential part of our education system, delivering stability, resilience, accountability and long-term improvement.

NGA recognises the enormous contribution of governance volunteers across the country to our schools, trusts and the young people they serve. Yet this contribution is too often neglected by policymakers, including central government. In our 20th year, this report is part of our mission to celebrate your contribution, and ensure it is properly recognised with support, investment and integration with national accountability frameworks.

National Association of Governor Advisory Services (NAGAS), Succession breeds success

Succession planning is crucial for maintaining strong leadership and ensuring continuity within governing boards. It involves strategic measures to build leadership capacity, from recruitment to chairing, and helps avoid crises by ensuring that leadership roles are filled by capable individuals. Effective succession planning fosters resilience and strengthens team dynamics, ultimately ensuring that governance remains strong and effective in the future.

NAGAS has updated their [Succession Breeds Success](#) document. This document aims to help your board identify the steps to create a culture in which governance leadership can thrive.

Safeguarding

Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 Consultation

The DfE has opened a [consultation for the proposed revisions to KCSIE for September 2026](#). The consultation includes [guidance on children who are questioning their gender](#).

The government say that this update 'reflects substantive changes that strengthen or clarify existing content, changes to multi agency working ahead of any legislation changes in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, where appropriate the recent Casey Audit, and adds content in relation to Violence Against Women and Girls.'

Please note this is currently a [consultation version](#) and schools do not need to make any changes until September 2026. This is a major update to KCSIE and the list of changes runs to six pages, see Annex D, page 195.

The consultation closes on Wednesday 22 April 2026 at 11.59pm.

Restrictive interventions, including use of reasonable force, in schools

As from 1 April 2026, DfE has produced updated [statutory requirements on restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force](#). Page 14 of this document contains statutory guidance from the DfE issued under section 93A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

PLEASE NOTE: The governing body or proprietor of a school in England must have regard to this in relation to recording and reporting each significant incident involving the use of force by members of staff. The rest of this guidance is non-statutory.

These changes apply to maintained schools, academies and independent schools in England.

Using after-school clubs, tuition and community activities

DfE have updated the [parent and carer's guide](#) 'DBS checks' section, to include information on Enhanced with Barred Lists DBS checks and reflect changes to DBS advice on eligibility on the safeguarding arrangements expected from activity clubs, tutors and coaches.

OFSTED

Ofsted and governance professionals

Ofsted has clarified the wording in the [School inspection operating guide for inspectors \(from November 2025\)](#) under 'Engaging with those responsible for governance'. The guidance should be read as two separate points:

1. Inspectors should speak to the governance professional to understand schemes of delegation.
2. Meetings with the governing board (chair and trustees) should usually take place without CEOs or other leaders present.

Ofsted has confirmed this will be made clearer in the next update. Governance professionals should therefore expect to meet inspectors alongside the trust board.

Other resources you may find of interest:

- [Martyn Oliver's speech at the Livery Education Conference 2026](#)
- [Understanding Ofsted report cards and grades](#)
- [School inspection: guidance and resources](#)
- [Early years inspection: guidance and resources](#)
- [Ofsted nominee training](#)
- [Jonathan Childs appointed Ofsted's new Deputy Director of Post-16 Education, Training and Skills](#)
- [Big Listen action monitoring reports](#), added 'Big Listen action monitoring report: December 2025'
- [Ofsted launches new QR code badges for promoting inspection findings](#), a new way for education providers to celebrate and share their inspection report cards with parents, carers and the wider community.

Finance

High needs funding arrangements: 2026 to 2027

Information for local authorities, schools and colleges about high needs funding arrangements for the 2026 to 2027 financial and academic year.

Schools insurance from 1 April 2026 and beyond (Maintained schools)

The Westmorland and Furness School Forum made the decision that the main insurance provision for maintained schools within Westmorland and

Furness will be arranged through the DfE's Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) and this will take effect from the 1 April 2026.

Consequently, this means that the main insurance provision for maintained schools would be no longer be arranged through the Council's insurance programme once the current period of cover expires at the end of March 2026. This means that the Council will no longer deduct from school budget shares the cost of Council arranged de-delegated insurance in 2026/27. Instead, there will be deduction for RPA charges which will be actioned as an in-year adjustment to school budget shares once the final RPA charges for 2026/27 have been published by the DfE.

NGA webinar: Financial governance: balancing the budget in times of challenge

NGAs webinar: [Financial governance: balancing the budget in times of challenge](#) is delivered by Lynne Fletcher, a Schools Resource Management Advisor (SRMA) and governance consultant. This webinar is available to watch on-demand and features insights into budget planning, financial tools and questions to ask.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

SEND and alternative provision change programme evaluation

[Interim summary](#) of findings from the evaluation of SEND and alternative provision change programme.

Development/Training

Westmorland and Furness Training Offer:

Governor Support Team Virtual Sessions 2025 to 2026

To support school governors/trustees to drive school development and deliver effective governance, we have a programme of planned virtual training sessions available for the 2025 to 2026 academic year listed below.

Booking: Places for 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.

Introduction to governance

For newly appointed/elected governors, trustees, associate members and local academy committee members 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: [19 May 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm](#)

Looking forward to inspection!

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

May be useful to all board members in light of the recent changes to the Ofsted inspection process.

Dates: [2 June 2026, 5pm to 6.30pm](#)

New: Governance recruitment, induction and retention

Explore how effective recruitment and induction of governors, associate members, trustees, and local academy committee members can enhance volunteer retention and support the overall impact of school governance.

We will be sharing practical ideas, useful resources, and actionable next steps to help governing boards refine their approaches to attracting, onboarding, and retaining dedicated volunteers.

Dates: [20 May 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm](#)

Clerking/Governance Professional Cluster Group 2025 to 2026

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

Dates: [3 June 2026, 4pm to 5.30pm](#)

Focus on minutes

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 331 730 488 999 0

Passcode: Ep76Xm3i

Chair's Briefings

Dates and joining instructions for the termly Chair Briefing sessions are listed below.

These sessions, led by Isobel Booler, Assistant Director of Education and Inclusion, will serve as a valuable platform for sharing key information and updates from the LA. Attendees will also have the opportunity to hear from various speakers on a range of topics and areas impacting schools.

Dates and links:

4 March 2026, 6pm to 7pm

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 336 948 389 264 0

Passcode: jB7iy2F3

9 June 2026, 6pm to 7pm

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 378 160 903 595 0

Passcode: g8zR6bn7

Finance Training Dates

Westmorland and Furness Council have arranged two in-person finance training sessions for maintained schools. The training will be delivered by Stephen Lester on behalf of the Institute of School Business Leaders. There is no cost to schools, it is a free event, funded by the DfE.

The sessions will be held on **Monday 9 March** at Kendal Town Hall, Council Chamber Room. The details are as follows:

Financial Planning & Budget Assumptions - Arrival 9.30am for 10am start

Session Objectives: Understand how to develop and maintain budget planning processes, how to develop robust evidence-based income and expenditure assumptions, understand the national and local formulae and how these impact the school's allocation.

Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning - Arrival 1.15pm for 1.30pm start

Session Objectives: how to apply ICFP principles by considering curriculum needs in financial planning, how to analyse and interpret data to identify trends, how to use ICFP to assist strategic decision-making.

To register for the sessions please email: schoolfinanceteam@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk

Please note that places are limited and therefore maintained schools with deficit budgets or forecasted deficit budgets will be prioritised. All school business managers, head teachers and **interested finance governors** are invited to register however we ask that attendees are limited to a maximum of 2 per school. You may register for one or both of the sessions. We also ask that you bring your own refreshments as we are unable to provide for these.

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:

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