



GST Newsletter

Issue 19, April 2026

Introduction

Welcome back, we hope you managed to have a lovely break over Easter.

It has been over three years since the establishment of Westmorland and Furness Council, how quickly has it went! It has been a busy time but thanks to all school staff who have carried on with the important day job of teaching our children and young people and thanks to everyone involved in delivering governance, which contributes to ensuring the best outcomes for all our children and young people.

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

Action

Home to school transport consultation – end date 21 April 2026

Westmorland and Furness Council has commenced a consultation on proposed changes to their Home to School Transport policy. The consultation is open from 27 February 2026 to 21 April 2026.

Full information, including links to the consultation documents, on-line survey response and details of engagement sessions that will be held during the course of the consultation period can be found at: [Home to School Transport: policy changes consultation, WFC](#).

NGA Learning Link (NGA LL) platform upgrade – what you need to do

On Wednesday 1 April 2026, NGA launched a new Learning Link platform, making it easier to find, access and manage learning.

Key improvements include simpler search, faster module access, full integration with the NGA website and user profiles, the ability for account managers to allocate learning to their boards, and more up-to-date content.

Please visit NGA [Learning Link platform upgrade](#): what to expect, where you will find a PDF guide or watch their [video tour](#).

Account managers can now access a step-by-step guide to [managing your board's e-learning \(PDF\)](#).



News/Updates/ Information

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

All schools

Energy Sparks – Holiday Switch Off

According to [Energy Sparks](#), last year their average primary school spent £1,400 on energy during the summer holidays and the average secondary school spent over £10,000. Create a holiday switch off - [Energy Sparks](#). Here are some things to look out for:-

- Hot water - e.g. central heating systems, electric immersion heaters, point of use electric water heaters
- ICT equipment - e.g. photocopiers & printers, IT servers that will not be needed, computers, device chargers, smart boards and projectors.
- Kitchen appliances - such as fridges and freezers. Check staff rooms, food tech rooms, labs and catering kitchens.

Make sure it is someone's job to check everything!

Zerengi has also published a helpful summer holiday checklist, focussing on five areas to power down your school site effectively - [Summer savings with Zenergi's school shutdown checklist](#)

School inspection data summary report guide

[The School Inspection data summary report \(IDSR\) guide](#) provides an overview for primary and secondary schools, including schools with a sixth form, and gives guidance on how to interpret the data.

In addition the [IDSR: news and updates](#) provides information about each IDSR release, including any new functionality, features and bug fixes.

If you need help understanding your IDSR, Ofsted have a webinar '[Achievement' evaluation area and how we use data: what schools need to know](#)' which gives a good base line in interpreting the data element of the ISDR.

The NGA is also having two webinars 'Using data with confidence' which you may find useful:

[For primary schools](#) – Thursday 16 April, 12:30 (Zoom)

[For secondary schools](#) – Thursday 14 May, 12:30 (Zoom)

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](#). Most recent update [Generative artificial intelligence \(AI\) and data protection in schools](#), outlining how to address the potential data protection risks of using generative AI in schools.

National consultation: Growing up in the online world

The government has launched a [consultation](#) on how technology affects children's wellbeing and how families can be better supported. Proposals include a minimum social media age, limits on addictive features such as infinite scrolling and autoplay, and making mobile phone guidance statutory for schools.

A response is expected this summer, with new legal powers allowing the government to act quickly. Governors and trustees are encouraged to share their views and promote engagement across school communities.

DfE teacher recruitment and retention plan

The DfE has published a [delivery plan](#) to **achieve its aim** of recruiting 6,500 new teachers by the end of this parliament. The plan focuses on three key themes:

- **Attract: to optimise routes into teaching** to better support a diverse range of high-quality candidates to successfully start their careers in teaching.
- **Retain: to improve teaching experience and boost retention** by increasing access and awareness of [flexible working](#), promoting best practice in workload and wellbeing management, supporting teachers and leaders to harness the benefits of technology, and ensuring fair pay across the sector – helping to sustain a thriving and resilient workforce.
- **Develop: to expand career-long development opportunities** to further support teachers in deepening their expertise and pursuing specialisms, including moving into leadership.

You may also be interested in a new report from the [Sustainable School Leadership project](#), a UK-wide study which explored the training, supply, retention and wider sustainability of senior school leadership.

National Careers Week – 2 to 7 March 2026

It was [National Careers week 2 to 7 March 2026](#). Effective careers guidance connects education with the world of work, helping young people to make informed choices and maximise their talents and ambitions.

Last year, the NGA worked with the Gatsby Charitable Foundation to launch the [secondary phase careers toolkit](#) to help boards meet their statutory duties.

The Gatsby Foundation has also [launched a new short film](#) that brings this work to life, showing how school and college leaders are transforming outcomes for young people.

Available here, a collection of [Statistics: not in education, employment or training \(NEET\) and participation](#).

Regional Improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) support for improving attainment in schools

A range of online and in person school support and professional development available through the regional [RISE programme](#) to help:

- Improve the attainment of children and young people
- Develop the skills of teachers and leaders
- Share best practice

Details of the [RISE](#) programme, support, networks, hubs and education advisers for the North West region.

Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges

The DfEs [Meeting digital and technology standards in schools and colleges](#), outlines how schools and colleges can use the right digital infrastructure and technology.

All schools and colleges should be [working towards meeting 6 core standards](#) by 2030:

- [Broadband internet](#)
- [Wireless network](#)
- [Network switching](#)
- [Digital leadership and governance](#)
- [Filtering and monitoring](#)
- [Cyber security](#)

First V Levels subjects revealed as part of landmark reforms

The government's press release: [First students to do V Levels from 2027 as part of landmark reforms to post-16 system that will prepare them for future jobs.](#)

From 2027, pupils will be able to take V levels in digital, education and early years, finance and accounting and will exist alongside A levels (the academic route) and T levels (the technical route). This streamlines the approximate 900 qualifications currently offered and means students will be able to take V levels alongside A levels.

Transition to the new system will be phased to give schools time to prepare.

New Ofsted report warns of barriers to academic progress for children in care, despite positive work of schools and colleges

A press release from [Ofsted](#), including research conducted on the experiences of children in care in schools and colleges: [How schools and colleges support the academic and personal progress of children in care.](#)

The DfE has also released a report on research [exploring the educational outcomes of children who remained in long-term foster care](#) after entering care before the age of 8.

New tool for families and schools to cut stigma of child poverty

The government's [press release](#) launching a child-friendly version of its [Child Poverty Strategy](#).

Government scraps high-sugar food from school menus

One in three children are leaving primary school overweight or obese, while tooth decay from diets high in sugar is the leading cause of hospital admissions for kids aged 5 to 9 – all while sugary treats and deep-fried food continue to feature on school menus.

The government has set out its [plans](#) to overhaul the School Food Standards for the first time in over a decade, with the intent that millions of children will benefit from healthier, more nutritious, tasty meals at school.

Safeguarding

Working together to safeguard children

An updated [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) has been published, introducing significant changes to how agencies work together.

The guidance strengthens expectations around anti-discriminatory and anti-racist practice, and expands its scope to explicitly include kinship care, adopted, looked-after and unborn children.

It also reinforces the need to consider the wider family context, recognising the impact of parental circumstances on siblings and other children.

Alongside this, there is greater emphasis on harms such as coercive control, child sexual abuse and teenage relationship abuse.

Andrew Hall safeguarding consultant, has created a 10 minute video introducing the changes: [Watch the video here.](#)

New DfE screen time guidance and online safety

The Early Years Screen Time Advisory Group (EYSTAG) was established in January 2026 to review available advice and scientific evidence on screen use by children aged under 5 in order to produce guidance. It has authored a report to government, which has now been published.

The report is based on a review of the existing scientific evidence. It takes into account qualitative evidence from charities and other early years stakeholders, parents and children, as well as the 132 responses to the [call for evidence](#). It sets out its findings and makes recommendations both to parents and government. The [methodology EYSTAG used for the review of systematic reviews](#) is also available.

The report's recommendations, and further parent and stakeholder engagement, formed the basis for DfE and Department for Health and Social Care [advice to parents and carers on under-5s' screen use](#). The aim is to give parents clear, evidence-backed advice on screen time for children under five. It recommends:

- For under-twos, screen time should be avoided except for shared activities.
- For children aged two to five, it should be limited to around one hour a day and avoided at mealtimes and before bed.

You may also find the governments '[Kids Online Safety](#)' campaign helpful, which is designed to help parents and carers support their children to navigate the digital world safely and confidently.

Over the past decade, access to information has become increasingly complex and contested.

In response, [Department of Science, Information and Technology](#) and the DfE have published [A Safe, Informed Digital Nation](#), setting out a national approach to media literacy. The paper highlights the role of schools and parents in helping children navigate online information safely.

Hopefully, this strategy will go on to support not only children and young people, but adults (including parents) themselves.

Proposal on support for pupils with medical conditions at school

The DfE is [consulting on proposed updates to the statutory guidance on supporting pupils with medical conditions at school](#).

As part of the proposal, schools would be required for the first time to hold spare adrenaline auto-injectors (allergy pens) for emergency use. The guidance would also introduce mandatory allergy awareness training for staff and require schools to maintain a clear policy for supporting pupils with medical conditions, including the use of Individual Healthcare Plans where appropriate.

The consultation is open and closes on 1 May 2026 and expected changes would come into force in September 2026 if approved.

Children's Mental Health

[Recent data](#) shows that 1 in 6 children are likely to have a mental health condition, up 50% in the last three years. To mark [Place2Be's Children's Mental Health Week](#) (9 to 15 February 2026), NGA's [latest blog](#) explores how governance can support inclusive practice and whole-school approaches to mental health, helping schools and trusts respond to rising levels of need.

Mental health charity Anna Freud also launched a new [training programme](#) to empower school staff to improve mental health and wellbeing support for neurodivergent students. Boards should consider how professional development for staff is prioritised to better support pupils in their settings.

Qwell: Innovative digital mental health support tool for adults

Adults across Westmorland and Furness can access free, anonymous and confidential mental health support 24 hours a day, 365 days a year from 1 April 2026. Qwell is an interactive digital mental health platform, where users can access a range of support online including:

- Connecting online with a qualified professionals via drop in and pre-booked sessions
- Moderated Community support - talking to someone with similar experiences
- Self guided resources - articles and interactive tools.

It offers flexible, clinically moderated support designed to reduce barriers to accessing mental health support. The service is free to use with no waiting lists, no referrals and no thresholds, providing immediate access whenever it is needed.

For more information and to sign up visit:

- [Qwell](#) (Adults)
- [Kooth](#) (Under 18s)

Residents without digital access can access support by phone:

- Samaritans Tel: 116 123
- or can call NHS 111 option 2 for a mental health crisis.

Protecting schools from terrorism - NGA webinar

Martyn's Law, or to give it its full title, The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, became law on 3 April 2025. Schools have 24 months (approximately April 2027) to comply with this legislation.

In this [webinar](#), NGA explain what the expectations of Martyn's Law are, which schools it applies to and what school leaders and governing boards should be doing to prepare for this.

In the webinar, Risk Protection Arrangement (RPA) is mentioned as an alternative to commercial insurance for schools and academies. If your establishment has RPA insurance in place there is a requirement for staff/governors to complete [cyber training as part of their insurance](#).

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) weekly podcast

The DBS service has launched a weekly podcast 'safeguarding in focus' to assist people to understand DBS processes. The first four episodes cover:

- What is DBS, and why does it matter?
- Understanding DBS checks: What are they and how they work.
- Basic checks - What you need to know.
- The Update Service.

The podcast can be accessed through [Spotify, Amazon and YouTube](#).

Single Central Record webinar (EduShield)

The single central record can be confusing, with many checks and unclear requirements. Louis Donald, Principal Safeguarding Partner at EduShield, has created a [free webinar](#) that clarifies statutory expectations and what compliant practice looks like in reality.

OFSTED

Ofsted training

As part of Ofsted's aim to be more transparent, they are making resources available via the Ofsted Academy. There are various recordings of [training delivered to inspectors](#) and also Ofsted deliver webinars for individuals working in the education sector, these can be found on their [Ofsted You Tube channel](#).

For example, as deep dives are no longer conducted, inspectors now conduct case sampling activities. If you would like to know more about inspectors approach to case sampling see [Case Sampling training for inspectors](#).

Ofsted announces new pilot to use more serving school and college leaders as inspectors

Ofsted has [announced](#) that it is piloting a new way of involving more serving education leaders in the inspections of schools and further education providers.

Ofsted's powers to consider complaints

Ofsted has produced a [blog](#) explaining the purpose of Ofsted's legislative powers to investigate complaints about schools.

Ofsted explains that as an inspectorate, they do not have the power to investigate individual circumstances – instead, they consider the broad themes that arise. In this blog they go on to explain the criteria required to warrant an inspection.

Requirements for early education and childcare inspections

Following a [letter](#) from Olivia Bailey MP, Minister for Early Education and Minister for Equalities, to the Ofsted Chief Inspector, Sir Martyn Oliver, Ofsted has announced they will begin inspecting early education and childcare providers more frequently from April 2026, in line with the DfE's [Best Start in Life strategy](#).

The [Early years inspection: toolkit, operating guide and information](#) has been updated to reflect changes to the inspection timescale from April 2026 for providers registered on the Early Years Register.

Big Listen action monitoring reports

Ofsted launched the [Big Listen](#) in March 2024.

Alongside the Big Listen, Dame Christine Gilbert carried out an [independent learning review](#) into Ofsted's response to the death of headteacher Ruth Perry. Dame Christine Gilbert recommended that Ofsted's actions and other improvement and development initiatives (including those arising from the Big Listen) should be integrated into a single, overarching improvement and development plan.

These monitoring reports set out Ofsted's actions and are published after every Board meeting. Recently added the '[Big Listen action monitoring report: February 2026](#)'.

Finance

Westmorland & Furness LA Scheme for Financing Schools – April 2026

A reminder that the [Westmorland & Furness LA Scheme for Financing Schools](#) has some revisions to the Challenge & Support Process for Schools with Deficit Budgets policy, Annex J.

Consistent financial reporting (CFR) framework

The [Consistent financial reporting \(CFR\) framework](#) helps schools to collect information about their income and expenditure.

Schools Finance Training

The Westmorland and Furness Finance Team are providing some finance training that is suitable for headteachers, school business managers and finance governors.

The finance team strongly recommend that delegates attend both sessions if they can, as the first session is a lead into the second session:

Date: 17 April 2026

Venue: Council Chamber, Kendal Town Hall:

- **AM session, arrive 9.30am for 10am start**
- **Financial Planning and Budget Assumptions**
- **PM session, arrive 13.15pm for 13.30pm start**
- **Integrated Curriculum Financial Planning.**

To register for a place, contact: schoolfinanceteam@westmorlandandfurness.gov.uk.

SEND

SEND reform: putting children and young people first

The DfE are [consulting](#) on proposals to reform the SEND system.

The consultation document explains the changes we plan to make and asks for comments from everyone with an interest.

The changes aim to improve help and support for children and young people with SEND across the [0 to 25 years system](#).

Supporting SEND provision and staff wellbeing

This [new document](#), from Education Support, provides a guide on how leaders and managers can take care of themselves and their teams, against the reality of an education system under increasing pressure.

Reminders

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE): Statutory changes you need to know

In 2025, the DfE published updated [statutory guidance for RSHE](#). Schools and trusts must ensure their curriculum and policies reflect these updated requirements from September 2026.

The new statutory guidance aims to ensure pupils are prepared for adult life, supporting their moral, social, mental and physical development.

Some of the curriculum changes include:

- Primary: A stronger focus on physical and digital safety, the use of accurate anatomical language, and the development of emotional resilience and personal boundaries.
- Secondary: Now addresses modern social challenges including AI literacy, misogyny, and knife crime, alongside expanded education on gynaecological health and navigating healthcare systems.

NGA and the [Personal, social, health and economic \(PSHE\) Association](#) have created a [blog](#) with a quick summary of what's new.

The PSHE Association has also published a [Programme of Study](#) that provides suggested learning opportunities for each key stage covering all the statutory RSHE content.

Reasonable force in schools - NGA

[Updated guidance](#) from the DfE on restrictive interventions, including the use of reasonable force in schools, which has come into effect on 1 April 2026.

It includes new requirements for schools to record significant incidents where a staff member uses force on a pupil and reporting these incidents to parents.

Additional guidance has been included to support the board's monitoring role. There will now be an expectation on those governing to regularly review data to identify:

- Any patterns or triggers
- Areas for staff learning and development
- Potential disproportionate use of interventions, especially for pupils with SEND, protected characteristics or other vulnerabilities.

[Read the new guidance](#) to ensure your school or trust remains compliant while supporting a positive culture around safeguarding and behaviour.

Governance Health Check

When was your last governance Health Check or review?

In the [Maintained School Governance Guide](#) it states:

1.2 Features of effective governance:

- Regularly reviewing governance effectiveness, including through external reviews of governance
- Commissioning external reviews to get an independent assessment of the governing body's effectiveness and areas for development, particularly at key growth or transition points

6. Evaluation:

Tools to help with evaluating governance can be found in:

- The National Governance Association's governing [board self-evaluation questions](#) ('20 questions') and [governing board skills audit](#)
- The Education Endowment Fund's [guide for governing boards](#).

Alternatively we have developed a [Health Check](#) that you can use as part of your self-assessment cycle.

School Governors Awareness Day (NSGAD)

School governors give their time, energy, and expertise to help schools thrive. NSGAD is an opportunity to recognise their impact, celebrate their commitment, and highlight the vital role they play in shaping education.

This year's NSGAD was Thursday 12th February 2026. If you missed it, recordings of all the sessions are available [here](#).

Volunteers Week 2026

[Volunteers' Week](#) is the annual opportunity to celebrate and thank your existing volunteers and reach out to new ones. This year Volunteers Week is 1 June 2026 to 7 June 2026.

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 Booter, 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:

9 June 2026, 6pm to 7pm

[Join the meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 378 160 903 595 0

Passcode: g8zR6bn7

Subject Access and Freedom of Information Requests Update

Over the past few years, schools have started to see an increase in the numbers of requests under Subject Access (SAR) or Freedom of Information (FOI) legislation. Schools are required to complete and return such requests within very short timescales and present all relevant information to the person making the application.

This short update on Teams will explain how the processes for each type of request works and make suggestions on how schools can deal with these most effectively. Senior leaders, administrators and governors are all welcome to attend:

Date: 28 April 2026 – 4pm to 5pm

Link: <https://teams.microsoft.com/meet/36405697813250?p=oXS6t67UK24EaAYCU3>

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:

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