



Seven priorities for governors at the start of the 2021/2022 academic year

This article will identify and focus on seven priorities governors will need to consider as schools go back in September 2021. It will detail any necessary actions governors will need to carry out, with specific consideration to the remaining effects of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the government's education recovery plan. Read on for more detail!

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Next steps

One: education recovery and financial profitability

Ordinarily, the governing board has a strategic role in the financial management of the school, and this Autumn term is no different; although, there may be slightly more considerations due to the additional education recovery funding streams. At the start of a new academic year, governors will need to decide how to deal with the issues caused by the coronavirus-related disruptions last year. This includes deciding what government-run education recovery schemes to opt for, as well as applying for the relevant additional funding.

Managing the school's finances is paramount to tackling lost learning and ensuring pupils are able to catch up on their education. To do this, governors should carefully evaluate the school's delegated budget for the year to ensure it is planned in accordance with the school's recovery aims, as well as the school's long term improvement plans.

The government has also released additional recovery schemes and funding that governors should consider implementing going forward. These include the National Tutoring Programme, the Recovery Premium for state schools, and the £10 million scheme to boost core skills.

For more information on the core skills boost, the government recommends that schools contact their local [Maths Hub](#), or visiting the [NCETM website](#). Schools that would like to find out more about the funding for English should contact one of the following English Hubs:

- North: [Jerry Clay English Hub](#)
- Midlands: Learners First English Hub
- South: New Wave English Hub

You can find more information on what this scheme entails [here](#).



Two: prioritising wellbeing

Schools and governing boards have experienced a fast-changing and unprecedented situation throughout the coronavirus pandemic. The result of operating in such an unpredictable environment has likely put a lot of stress on school leaders, staff and pupils. Although school life is starting to get back to normal, the impact of last year should not be underestimated. As they go forward into the new school year, governors should, therefore, prioritise the health and emotional wellbeing of school staff, pupils and fellow governors. Governing boards in their commitment to ensuring consistent and effective governance should not overlook the significance of emotional wellbeing within an effective model of education recovery. Wellbeing should be given equal priority to curriculum catch-up.

Governors should be part of a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. As part of the school's management, the governing board is instrumental in setting the tone of the school's approach and ethos; therefore, governors should be informed as to how best to promote wellbeing. Governors should be aware of Public Health England's eight principles which are key to achieving a whole-school approach towards supporting and prioritising emotional health and wellbeing. These include the following:

- An ethos and environment that promotes respect and values diversity

- Curriculum, teaching and learning to promote resilience and support social and emotional learning
- Enabling pupil voice to influence decisions
- Staff development to support their own wellbeing and that of pupils
- Identifying need and monitoring the impact of interventions
- Working with parents and carers
- Targeted support and appropriate referral

The push on supporting wellbeing in schools has been echoed by the DfE, as it launched its new guidance on '[Promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing in schools and colleges](#)'. In conjunction with this guidance, the DfE has developed a wellbeing for recovery programme, which seeks to fund LAs in order to provide additional support to schools and colleges, including:

- Helping with navigation of existing provision to make the best use of the recovery and pupil premium funding.
- Continuing to deliver wellbeing for education return training, on issues such as bereavement and loss, understanding anxiety and low mood, and actions for building resilience and recovery.
- Providing ongoing support and advice supporting schools and colleges to assess their needs and provision.

If schools are interested in accessing this support, they are advised to contact their LA directly.

Governors should also consider assigning a senior mental health lead within their school if they do not have one already. Doing so will give a specific staff member delegated responsibility and the necessary training to feel supported in this role. This member of staff will then be eligible to receive specific grant funding for their training. To take part in this scheme, schools need to apply for the grant, then the DfE will contact the school regarding their training needs. There are lots of different training providers which can be accessed through the [DfE's contract finder](#). Suitable candidates for this role include the headteacher, deputy headteachers, and members of the SLT, or if not a senior leader, an appropriate member of staff, working with colleagues, who is empowered to develop and oversee the school's whole-school approach.

Three: general admin duties

Dealing with the after-effects of the coronavirus pandemic has meant that there are many other additional considerations for governors this year; however, general admin duties for the start of the academic year still remain equally important. For schools to move forward and effectively recover from the coronavirus pandemic, governors should ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction. To achieve this, governors need to ensure they have a solid foundation which is built upon an exceptional execution of general administrative duties. Neglecting the basic, key requirements, however futile they seem, will only create more disruption as the academic year progresses.

Governing board annual schedule of work

A key administrative duty which should be conducted at the start of the academic year is the governing board annual schedule of work. This is where the governors, in partnership with the clerk and headteacher, develop and agree upon an annual schedule of work for full governing board meetings and committee meetings, clearly defining what needs to be achieved and by when. Such advanced planning will provide the school with a stabilising anchor point, helping to ensure clarity of vision which will be vital when navigating an effective education recovery. Advanced scheduling also allows governors to identify key areas they would like to monitor in the year ahead, such as safeguarding, pupil outcomes, catch-up schemes or wellbeing. For more details on how to conduct an annual schedule of work, read our guidance article [here](#).

The school development plan

In conjunction with the schedule of work, governing boards should also use the start of a new academic year to review the school's current position and take stock of what is going well and what needs to be improved. The results of these findings can be developed, agreed and monitored within a school development plan (SDP). Governors should be key contributors to this working document, which aims to drive school improvements and priorities. Coming out of a time where schools had to deal with a great level of uncertainty, such a document will be useful in giving schools a clear direction. Our [SDP template](#) can provide a framework for your school to create its own improvement plans.



A few good practice tips:

- School development plans will need to be flexible and adaptable as schools continue to deal with the coronavirus pandemic.
- Governors need to identify the school's key priorities for the year ahead.

Good practice

Four: new academy trust handbook

Governors in academies should be aware that moving forward, the 'Academies financial handbook' has been updated and will now be known as the 'Academy trust handbook'. This name change is to reflect the handbook's divergent scope, as it now goes beyond just financial management requirements. This key document provides an overarching framework which outlines effective financial management for academies and much more. To prepare for the start of a new academic year, governors are expected to be aware of all the new updates and changes to this document. Doing so is not just considered good practice, but as a statutory document, it is expected that governors read and understand this handbook in order to stay compliant and ensure their school is operating at an optimum level.

This year, the main changes include the term 'clerk to the board' being replaced to now be known as 'governance professional', trust's meeting agendas and minutes must now be made available to the public, and new requirements related to senior executive leaders have been added. For a more in-depth look at the changes this year, read our comprehensive [Up-to-speed on: Changes to the 'Academy trust handbook 2021'](#), which outlines all the key updates and information you need to know.

Five: release of 'Keeping children safe in education 2021'

'Keeping children safe in education' (KCSIE) gets updated every year, and this year is no different. As a statutory document, it is imperative that all governors read it and have due regard to it when carrying out their duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils who attend the school. This is not only good practice; it is a statutory requirement. All governors in maintained schools and proprietors of academy trusts are required to read the guidance in full.

Governors will then be responsible for ensuring the school's safeguarding policies and procedures are compliant with '[Keeping children safe in education 2021](#)', which comes into effect from 1 September 2021. In response to this, we have updated our [Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy](#), which has been created in line with the relevant legislation. Implementing this Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy will ensure your school is meeting its statutory requirements, as it outlines a consistent framework which adopts a whole-school preventative approach.

After Ofsted's review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, governors should also be aware that KCSIE 2021 has put an emphasis on tackling peer-on-peer abuse. To help you address this specific area of safeguarding effectively, we have created a separate [Peer-on-peer Abuse Policy](#), which also incorporates the good practice advice on '[Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)'.

To ensure all staff and governors are familiar with KCSIE 2021, we have created a '[Keeping children safe in education](#)' [Quiz for Staff](#). Governors can also use this resource to identify areas which require further staff training.

Six: early career framework reforms

Another update governors need to be aware of are the '[Early career framework reforms](#)'. The reforms will mean that new teachers will no longer be referred to as newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and instead will be known as early career teachers (ECTs). As part of the reforms, all ECTs in England will be entitled to two years of professional development and the statutory induction for new teachers will change.

Before the start of the new academic year, it is important that governors read this updated guidance, be involved with the selection of a delivered approach to meet new requirements, and ensure their school has set up their programme through the DfE's online service if the school wants to use an approved funded provider.

Our [Early Career Teacher \(ECT\) Resource Pack](#) can be used to familiarise yourself with all the key documentation to support this reform. Ensuring your ECTs feel fully supported is part of the governing board's role. Making sure your school has all the relevant documents and procedures in place is one way governors can offer support.

Seven: exams in 2022

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, exams for the past two years have been forced to adapt; in many circumstances, they have been removed all together and replaced with teacher-assessed grades. As a new academic year gets underway, it is hoped school procedures will return to some sort of pre-pandemic normality; however, exam procedures are set to recognise and mitigate the disruption to pupils' education.

The government has, therefore, proposed arrangements for exams in 2022, which will take into account the disruption pupils have faced since March 2020. Governors should be aware that exams will take place this academic year; however, they may look slightly different to normal. The proposed arrangements to assessments were outlined in a consultation which focusses on the following adaptations:

- Giving schools the choice regarding which topics pupils will be assessed on in GCSE English literature, history and geography
- Providing advance information of exam content in the majority of GCSE, AS- and A-level subjects to help pupils focus on their revision
- Giving pupils formulae sheets in GCSE maths exams
- Altering requirements for practical science work and practical art and design assessments

This joint consultation from Ofqual and the DfE closed on 1 August 2021; however you can still read the proposals in full [here](#). Governors should keep an eye out for the result of this consultation, which is expected to be published during the Autumn term. As always, we will keep you up-to-date with all the latest information.

Next steps

- Read our article: [Up-to-speed on: Education Policy Changes Being Implemented From September 2021](#)
- Complete our e-learning course: [Safeguarding for governors](#)
- Use our template: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): Risk Assessment for Schools](#)

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