

# Governor Headlines

#59, February 2024



Governor Headlines is a regular newsletter produced by Suffolk County Council's Governor Services team to support you in your role as governors.

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# A MESSAGE FROM SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL'S GOVERNOR SERVICES TEAM

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**Veronica Mwondela**  
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To those that we haven't managed to see yet, we wish you a very happy new year!

The Christmas break seems to be so far in the past as the year is already hurtling towards the end of the first half of the spring term. As usual, there is ever so much to do and seemingly so little time. In this newsletter there is a reminder of the Spring term tasks that may hopefully be useful, especially for tasks that have a deadline attached. In line with your feedback, we are trying to supply as many practical tools as possible. Please click on the various links in the newsletter to see if any can help you to work more efficiently as well as effectively.

Talking of Spring, it will soon be time for our Spring Conference. We have again taken into account the feedback we received after last year's conference. As a result, this year the conference will take place over a whole day, rather than just half the day. This will enable more time to be given to the practical workshops and networking time. It is never too early to start suggesting themes that you would like to explore in the workshops so please complete the short survey included in this newsletter. We would love to hear from you.

More details will follow but, in the meantime, please save the date: **Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024**

Finally, we try to get to visit as many of your schools as possible, but please do get in touch if there is anything you need be supported with.

Thank you for all you do for the children of Suffolk. We are here to support governing boards in any way we can, and our contact details are below.

Email: [governance@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:governance@suffolk.gov.uk)

Tel: 01473 265987 or 01473 260163

# The Knowledge

Please find February's edition of The Knowledge [here](#).

The Knowledge is a half-termly briefing for governors and trustees, keeping you informed of the latest statutory updates.



## Spring Governance Conference Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May 2024

This article is for: all governors of maintained schools, all phases.



Save  
the  
Date

Following the success of our first governance conference for maintained school governors in the spring term 2023, we are delighted to be able to announce that this year's conference will take place on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> May. The conference will again be held at Kesgrave War Memorial Community Centre. Following feedback from the previous event, this year's conference will take place across the whole day, rather than half a day.

We are keen to build on the success of our 2023 conference and to make the program for the day as tailored to your needs as possible. To assist us

in our planning we would be very grateful if you could complete a brief survey telling us which workshops you would like to take part in and what information you would like available. The survey can be found at the following link:


<https://forms.office.com/e/2WvjNwtP2u>

We really hope that you will be able to join us for the conference. Invitations will be sent shortly.

# Spring Term Tasks

This article is for: all governors of LA maintained schools, all phases.

Statutory tasks are in **bold**.



TASK
<input type="checkbox"/> Schools that aren't your own admission authority: Make sure your LA has published <a href="#">admissions arrangements</a> for your school, OR <b>Schools that are your own admission authority: Publish your admissions arrangements for September 2025 on your website</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Schools that are your own admission authority: Convene an admissions appeals panel, if needed. Publish your appeals timetable for 2024 on your website</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Consider and agree next year's budget. The Deadline for budgets to be signed off by the governing board is 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. A copy is to be sent to the LA by 30<sup>th</sup> April 2023.</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Make sure equality information (and objectives, where necessary) is reviewed, and the school website updated</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <b>Make sure gender pay gap information is published, where applicable</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> Review pupil welfare information to identify priorities for next year, including: Safeguarding Careers guidance Pupil premium provision
<input type="checkbox"/> Review estates management to identify priorities for maintenance and development for the following year (if not covered by a sub-committee)
<input type="checkbox"/> Review and approve any changes to the school's staffing structure

KEY DATES AND DEADLINES	
14 February	<b>Spring census return deadline</b>
28 February	Deputy Headteachers who wish to leave at the end of the spring term must have handed in their resignation by this date (check your deputy Headteacher's contract as this may vary)
28 February	<b>Schools that are your own admission authority:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deadline to determine <a href="#">admissions arrangements</a> for September 2025</li> <li>• Deadline to publish admissions appeals timetable for 2024 on your website</li> </ul>
1 March	<a href="#">National offer day</a> for secondary schools
15 March	<b>Schools that are your own admission authority: Deadline to send a copy of your <a href="#">admission arrangements to your LA</a> for entry in September 2025, and publish the arrangements on your website</b>
30 March	<b>Deadline to publish gender pay gap information if applicable</b>
6 April	Financial year begins for maintained schools
6 April	<b>Deadline for updating information on how your school is complying with the <a href="#">Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)</a> (in most cases – schools first had to publish this by 6 April 2012 and it has to be updated at least annually, with equality objectives needing to be published at least once every 4 years)</b>

## School Admission Arrangements for 2025/2026

This article is for: all governors of mainstream academies, free schools and voluntary aided schools, all phases.

All voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies must determine their admission arrangements for the 2025/2026 school year by **28<sup>th</sup> February 2024**, even if they have not been changed from the previous year and a consultation was not required.

Admission arrangements include your oversubscription criteria, Published Admission Number and Supplementary Information Form, if relevant.

[View further information](#)

Contact: [jan.scott@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:jan.scott@suffolk.gov.uk) , 01473 264657

# Thematic Review of Governance

This article is for: all governors of maintained schools, all phases.

During the autumn term, a school thematic review of governance and financial controls was undertaken by the internal audit team. Themes were identified and as a result we are advising that governing boards review their own board's practices to ensure effective financial controls:

- Finance Committee meeting minutes need to be clear to show decisions made against the budget.
- School websites need to have up to date information concerning governing body structure, pecuniary interests, and attendance at meetings.
- The Decision Planner must be reviewed annually.
- Decisions made in your school must clearly correlate with the level of responsibility identified in the decision planner.

“Decisions made in your school must clearly correlate with the level of responsibility identified in the decisions planner.”

It was observed that Governing Boards are not always making use of the governance and planning tools such as 'Asking the right questions' ([Governance Handbook, p.32,33](#)) and '[School Resource Management: top 10 planning checks for governors](#)' .

Finally, Governors and Headteachers also noted that they would benefit from receiving more regular financial guidance and updates in communications such as Governor Headlines. Guidance and updates will therefore feature in Governor Headlines in the future. As a start, we have included links to the two resources above that the auditors identified.

# School Finance

This article is for: all governors of maintained schools, all phases.

## 2024-25 Budget

School budget toolkits will be issued to schools on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2024 (subject to DfE validation).

Schools are required to update the budget plan page of the toolkit and to confirm the prepared by / date of preparation and the date of the meeting at which the 2024-25 budget plan was approved.

## Strategic Planning for 2025-26 & 2026-27

Within the toolkit schools will also complete the 3 year strategic plan for the following two years. This will need to be based on the current information schools have and best estimates around income and expenditure levels.

The strategic plans will need to be signed off by governors during the first half of the Summer Term 2024. A copy of the approved toolkit will need to be sent to the LA by 30<sup>th</sup> May 2024.

## Deadlines

ACTION	DEADLINE
<b>2024-25 Budget Plan approved by Governors</b> 2024-25 one-year Budget Plan must be approved by Governors	31 <sup>st</sup> March 2024
<b>2024-25 Budget Toolkit with the LA</b> 2024-25 Budget Toolkit (containing the one-year budget) must be with the LA	30 <sup>th</sup> April 2024
<b>3-Year Strategic Plan (2025-26 &amp; 2026-27) Toolkit with the LA</b> 3-Year Strategic plan must be with the LA and signed off by Governors	30 <sup>th</sup> May 2024

## Financial Difficulties

Schools that are struggling to balance their budgets should, in the first instance, contact the Schools' Accountancy Team [sat@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:sat@suffolk.gov.uk) who will be able to advise on the next steps and the support available from the Local Authority.



# School Improvement Engagement Model

This article is for: all governors of all schools, all phases.

Following consultation events with Headteachers and governors and reviewing the impact of current ways of working, from January 2024 the Standards and Excellence team will transition to the 'School Improvement Engagement Model' as the model for the team's work.

The model maps out how LA maintained school leaders and LA officers work together to support the leadership of school improvement and secure strong, self-improving schools. We will harness the wide bank of evidence-informed practice across LA maintained schools and LA teams to work together as 'the team around each school' to achieve success together.

Through this engagement in school improvement, we can work together to achieve our shared aspirations and high expectations for Suffolk children. School leaders can use the model to select which entitlement best reflects their school's current position and best meets their school's current needs.

[This link will take you to Suffolk Learning where you will find further information.](#)

If you would like to talk about the model, or have any questions, please contact your school's Standards and Excellence Partner or Regional Lead for Education in the first instance.

# Standards and Excellence Partner Visits and Rolling Records

This article is for: all governors of maintained schools, all phases.

Joining the meetings between your school leaders and the Standards and Excellence Partner (SEP) will support you in fulfilling your roles as governors. We would strongly encourage members of the governing body to attend meetings at your school. The visits will give a helpful insight into your school's improvement work. Visits from the SEP occur at least half-termly in LA-maintained schools, and termly in academies that take up the offer. These visits offer an external view of the school that in turn helps governors in their monitoring. It doesn't have to be the Chair of Governors who attends these meetings, nor does it have to be the same governor each time, however, feeding back to the whole governing body will help the board as a whole.

Evaluations made during SEP visits are compiled by the SEP in a Rolling Record and uploaded to the Perspective Lite website. Your Headteacher cannot give governors access to their own account, however they can provide governors with a separate log in and appropriate level of access. We would encourage you to be aware of this document as it contains useful information to celebrate strengths and confirm priorities as well as an external view about the school's performance all of which are helpful for governors in supporting school leaders and holding to account.

## Safeguarding and School Governance

This article is for: all governors of all schools, all phases.

We are all agreed that it is the responsibility of all governing boards to ensure that our school has effective safeguarding policies and procedures in place. The responsibility for monitoring safeguarding is for all governors, even though each board will have a link governor for safeguarding. The checklist, which you will find in [this link](#), may be a useful tool to help governors support and challenge your school leadership team.

In addition, the County Council has been carrying out safeguarding focussed visits to support the schools as an additional pair of eyes. Although the visits are with Headteachers, it is always good to have the lead safeguarding governor in attendance.

# School Leadership: Do You Have a Contingency Plan?

This article is for: all governors of maintained schools, all phases.

It is widely accepted that the leadership of a school has a significant influence on the quality of education that the school provides. When a Headteacher decides to leave a school, there is usually sufficient notice given to enable governors to carry out a well-planned recruitment process. However, this is not always the case, as sometimes a Headteacher may suddenly become unable to work for an unforeseen reason.



“Governors should have a plan in place in case interim arrangements are needed at short notice.”

Although this does not happen often, governors should have a plan in place in case interim arrangements are needed at short notice. This would help reassure the school community, including staff, parents and pupils, at a time which might feel unsettling. The plan might include agreeing an arrangement with a local Headteacher who might be able to provide leadership support. It may also include clarity on whether a deputy head could automatically step up, or whether there would be a need to advertise. There may also be further support needs identified.

If you would like support in planning for this, please contact your school's Standards and Excellence Partner or governor services, in the first instance.



## REMINDER:

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are integral to the culture of your school and should inform every decision you make as a governing board. That's why we want to introduce an EDI focused article to each edition of Governor Headlines.

If you have been carrying out a particular piece of EDI related work in your school, we would love to hear from you. We're keen to celebrate your successes and hope to share good practice with other governing boards.

Equally, if you would like guidance on an EDI related topic, please get in touch with us. We will aim to offer support in this newsletter as appropriate.

You can reach us at our email address [governance@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:governance@suffolk.gov.uk) .

## Data Available to Governors

This article is for: all governors of all schools, all phases.

We have put together a summary of the sources of data that school leaders and governors can use to inform their discussions their school's performance. Schools also have their own processes for tracking how well pupils are learning while they are at the school. As well as the Rolling Record, sources of data include:

- Analyse School Performance (ASP)
- Inspection Data Summary Report (IDSR)
- School Improvement Summary (SIS)

The Primary School Improvement Summary sheets have now been updated with final published performance data.

Please find more detailed information on how to access and interpret this data [here](#).

# Data for New Governors

This article is for: all governors of all schools, all phases.

The second core function of governance is listed in the [Department of Education Governance Handbook](#) as “holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff”.

Without data, governors cannot effectively hold leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, so it's important to know where to access the data available and how to interpret and question it.

In addition to the data sources provided in the article above, a good place to start is with Headteacher reports. The NGA, in their [Welcome to Governance](#) handbook, suggest the following first steps for new governors:

- 1) Read the last two Headteacher reports presented to our governing board – are there clear headlines relating to progress, attainment, behaviour, attendance? If not discuss this with the Chair of Governors.
- 2) Study the performance data and identify one or two questions to ask.
- 3) Seek the support or training you need to help interpret the data.

Your Chair of Governors or your mentor, if you have been provided with one as part of your induction, can also explain to you how monitoring visits are carried out by the board. We would recommend that you ask to read the governor visit policy and arrange your place on the schedule of visits.

Your school's Standards and Excellence Partner (SEP), the Standards and Excellence Team and the Assessment Team will be able to support your board in the use of its data. If you have not done so already, we would also recommend that you enrol on the Schools' Choice “Governors' Role in School Improvement” training, which makes up one of the four sessions in their “Essential Sessions” training for new governors. The session considers how gathering and analysing a wide range of performance data and information can help governors understand their schools' strengths and areas for development. You can find out more about the Schools' Choice training available and how to book in their [training brochure](#).

“Without data, governors cannot effectively hold leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils.”