



Department for Schools and Colleges

Go-Governance - a newsletter for Governors, Directors and Clerks

Issue 32 - December 2023

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of *Go-Governance* of the 2023-24 school year.

1) Education Sunday - Thank You!

In the last edition of *Go-Governance* (edition 31), I mentioned the 175th anniversary of Education Sunday on 10 September. We used this occasion to try to attract new governor/director applications, by including an appeal in the Diocesan newsletter & website, asking parishes & schools to include one in their newsletters & websites, as well as asking for appeals to be made at Masses. I'm pleased to report that this all helped to generate plenty of interest and **19** new appointments have been made so far this term, with **17** applications going through the appointment process. Many thanks for any support you were able to give to the day and a particular thank you to any Chairs/Heads who were able to make an appeal at Mass. I'm aware of two Chairs who were delighted when they both received 3 x new applications, after they made an appeal after Mass at their parish churches. If you have not already done so, please consider if you could also make an appeal - you never know what response you might get!

2 - Religious Education Training - new dates

In September, Louise White, RE Adviser, provided training for RE Link Governors. Louise has arranged to repeat this training, on the following dates:

- ❖ Day 1 - 16 January 2024 - The role of the RE Link Governor
- ❖ Day 2 - 23 January 2024 - The new RE Directory (RED)
- ❖ Day 3 - 1st February 2024 - Section 48 Inspections

Whilst primarily aimed at RE Link Governors, it will help **all** governors to increase their understanding of what is required by Catholic schools, particularly for the introduction of the new RE Directory and the new Prayer & Liturgy Directory [116.pdf \(catholiceducation.org.uk\)](#) and so all governors are encouraged to attend.

Many thanks to those who attended any of the training sessions during the autumn term. The remaining sessions (all via Microsoft Teams) for this year are:

- ❖ Induction for new governors - 2nd March 2024 (Saturday) 10.00 - 11.30 am and 6th June 2024 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm.
- ❖ Refresher for experienced governors - 9th May 2024 6.30 pm - 8.00 pm.
- ❖ Admissions - 25th May 2024 (Saturday) 10:00 - 11:30 am.
- ❖ Clerks/Governance Professionals - 6th February 2024 9.30 - 11.00 am.

To reserve a place on the RE training and/or any of the above sessions, please complete a Course Booking Form [Events – Calendar | Clifton Diocese Schools and Colleges](#)

3 – Effective Virtual Attendance

Legislation states virtual attendance at a **maintained** school governor meeting must be agreed by the whole governing body (GB). The law says that the GB may approve virtual attendance, so there is no automatic right to attend using technology, such as Teams or Zoom etc. If the GB says no, it is not permitted for the GB or its committees. The same legislation says that any decision to be made is decided by "a majority of the votes of the governors present and voting on the question". However, governors can be "present" at the meeting virtually, (if approved by the GB). For example, by telephone or video conference - but decisions **cannot** be made via email.

At **multi academy trusts**, directors may attend virtually if they comply with clause 126 of their articles of association and governors of their local governing bodies, may also do so, if it is permitted by the multi academy trust board. Governors of single **academy** trust boards may do so, if they comply with clause 123 of their articles of association. All **academy** trusts may wish to approve a policy on virtual attendance but there is no requirement to do so.

The potential benefits for bodies implementing virtual governance routines include improved engagement, business continuity and the opportunity to recruit governors/directors from further afield. However, an overreliance on virtual governance can also impact on working relationships and the connection between governance and the school(s) community it serves. Therefore, the National Governors Association (NGA) recommends that boards do not rely solely upon virtual means to govern, rather discuss and reach a consensus on how to achieve the best solution. The NGA <https://www.nga.org.uk/knowledge-centre/virtual-governance/> and **The Key** [Virtual meetings: your complete guide | GovernorHub Knowledge \(thekeysupport.com\)](https://www.thekeysupport.com/virtual-meetings-your-complete-guide) both provide guidance for their members, that contains advice for governing bodies to support these discussions and to achieve effective virtual governance.

4 - Latest News

If schools have any special events, celebrations, achievements etc. that they would like to promote, please send details (and if possible, a suitable photograph to) to Jenny Fitzgerald via jenny.fitgerald@cliftondiocese.com and she would be happy to include them on the new 'Latest News' page <https://schools.cliftondiocese.com/latest-news> of the Schools & Colleges Department website

5 - Mentoring support - can you help?

One of our newly elected Chairs of Governors, would appreciate some mentoring support from an experienced Chair. It would involve having the occasional email exchange, telephone chat and/or Teams meeting to help answer any queries & provide advice as appropriate. It would not involve any travelling, as you would not need to meet in person. If you would like to offer your support, please send me an email via bill.mcentee@cliftondiocese.com (giving me permission to pass on your contact details) and I'll put you in touch with each other.

6 - Safeguarding

We have unfortunately had several cases lately where new Foundation Governors have been found to have been attending meetings etc., without having been given permission by the Diocese to do so. Please may I remind everyone that new Foundation Governors are usually appointed on a provisional basis, and so are **not** permitted to start their role until the Diocese has notified them (and the Chair & Clerk), that they may do so. The initial email notifying applicants

that the Bishop has provisionally appointed them, does specify that they must **not** start until DBS & Section 128 clearances have been completed and that the Diocese has issued their confirmation of appointment, with permission to commence their duties. This two-stage process is to try to ensure that we do not compromise the safety of our children by having governors operating without appropriate clearances. Failure to comply with Safeguarding procedures is also a failure point in Ofsted inspections.

7) - Complaints and reciprocal arrangements audit

As mentioned in previous editions, when a complaint is received against a member of staff/governor, it may not always be appropriate for governors from your own GB to consider the complaint, perhaps because they are already familiar with the issue, so cannot be considered independent or perhaps the complaint is against the whole FGB. It can sometimes be even more difficult to find suitable governors who are able to consider any subsequent appeals. GBs have therefore been asked to ensure that they have reciprocal arrangements in place with other GBs, to cover these situations. This avoids GBs having to undertake desperate searches to find governors from other GBs, who are prepared and available, to sit on a complaints/appeals panel at short notice, within the required timescales. However, there have been some recent occurrences where a complaint has been received & the GB has not had any reciprocal arrangements in place. The Diocese will be undertaking an audit in the new future, to establish if all GBs have put in place reciprocal arrangements in place with other GBs (preferably within their school partnership group). If you have not already done so, please ensure that you put reciprocal arrangements in place with other GBs to provide support for each other in these situations as soon as possible.

8) - Have you set your Admission Arrangements for 2025-26?

Please remember that all governing bodies/CET boards must, if they have not already done so, determine their arrangements by 28 February 2024 at the latest. Please see para. 150 of the School Admissions Code [School admissions code 2021 \(cliftondiocese.com\)](https://www.cliftondiocese.com) for details of what it is required.

Even though, that in line with the common admission arrangements for both primary & secondary schools agreed with Bishop Declan, no changes must be

made to your arrangements* for 2025-26 (apart from rolling forward the dates) they must still be determined by 28 February.

*(*except for the 2 secondary schools consulting on the inclusion of an additional parish).*

9) - New criteria for Primary Schools for 2026-27?

As previously advised, the Diocese has consulted with **primary** schools about the possibility of introducing new oversubscription categories within the common primary policy. A ballot form on the proposals was sent to primary governing bodies and CET Boards in August - if you have not yet returned your ballot form, please do so by 16 February 2024. If the result of the ballot is in favour of including any new criteria, it will require a public consultation by all schools, but this would not occur until the autumn term 2024 for introduction in the 2026-27 school year.

10) - Academy Annual General Meetings

As advised in previous editions, the dates of the Academy Trust AGM with Bishop Declan have been scheduled for January 2024. Formal letters of invitation will be sent out in week commencing 11 December.

11) - Catholic Educational Trusts (CET)

Many congratulations to St Edmund's Primary, Calne who formally joined the Dunstan CET on 1 November 2023. St Louis Primary, Frome are going through the transfer process and so are aiming to also join it on 1 January 2024 - making ten schools in the trust. The Little Way CET of six of our Gloucestershire primary schools is also on course to open on 1 January 2024. If you have experience in Human Resources and/or Legal matters, then please would you consider joining its board of directors. The Dunstan CET and the Newman CET would also appreciate some new directors and are both particularly seeking someone with a background in Accountancy. If you have some experience in any of the above-named skills, please would you consider offering your services to help support our CETs by applying to be a CET Director. Please email me at bill.mcentee@cliftondiocese.com and I'll send you the appropriate forms.

12) - Thank you and Christmas wishes

On behalf of Bishop Declan and all the members of the Diocesan Schools & Colleges Department, please may I express our sincere gratitude for all that you have done for the benefit of all the pupils and staff in our schools in 2023. Your hard work, time and commitment, in many cases without your full complement of governors/directors, whilst balancing the demands of your family and/or work commitments has again, been exceptional and has been greatly valued and appreciated.

I hope you all manage to have a well-deserved rest and may I wish you and your loved ones, a very happy and holy Christmas.



I look forward to working with you all in 2024.

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