

# COVID-19 and its potential impact on Governing Board membership

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The term 'governors' is used throughout to refer to whoever is responsible for fulfilling governance functions - whether that be the governors of a maintained school, the trustees of a Standalone or Multi-Academy Trust, or the local governors to whom the function in question has been delegated within a MAT.

## **Octavo Governance**

*Providing all school governors with professional development and consultancy, enabling them to jointly lead and manage their schools and achieve the best outcomes for their pupils*



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## Context

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, in line with Public Health England guidelines, all non-essential contact must now be avoided to stop the spread of COVID-19. In light of this, the Department for Education is advising against Governing Boards meeting in person, recommending that alternative arrangements are adopted, for example, the use of video or teleconferencing applications. This reiterates the advice and guidance that was recently issued by Octavo Governance.

The spread of COVID-19 raises the question of what could happen if key members of the Governing Board were to become temporarily unavailable, on the grounds of ill-health, and thus unable to participate in Board meetings.

Governing Boards of both maintained schools and academies are recommended to consider the following:

Q: Is there an elected Vice-Chair in place who is able to take on the role of Acting Chair in the event that the elected Chair is unavailable?

- This would involve potential decision making in between Board meetings as well as the chairing of meetings (agenda oversight, chairing and review of meeting minutes).
- Is the Vice-Chair appraised of all the key governance issues?

Q: If both the elected Chair and Vice-Chair were to become unavailable, could key governance decisions be made?

- Would their unavailability have an impact on meeting quorum?
- Would it be a more effective use of limited governance resource to move to a short-term flat Governing Board structure, without committees?
- What framework does the Board have in place to ensure that a Governor is in place to step into the role of leading the Board and leading key decisions? Would the Board either:
  - Elect a Chair on a meeting by meeting basis; or
  - To provide some consistency, elect a short term Chair until either the Chair or Vice-Chair became available?

To support this decision making:

- A rotating Chair would need to be in place not just for the meeting itself but available for decision making, communication with the Head and the rest of the Board until the next meeting when a new, temporary Chair was elected.
- A temporary Chair could be a current Committee Chair.
- It could also be an ex-Chair who, whilst no longer Chair, remained on the Board of Governors.
- Boards may also wish to consider how effective and practical it would be for the Head to contact specific Governors for guidance dependent on allocated Link Responsibilities (i.e. the Safeguarding Governor for a safeguarding query) instead of the temporary Chair as a single point of contact?

Temporary Chairs would need to establish the process and frequency of contacting the Head during formal school closures as well as be appraised of current, key governance issues.

## **Staff Governors should not take on the role of temporary Chair.**

Q: In the event of a Headteacher becoming unwell, who would be the main decision-maker and contact for the Governing Board? Has this been disseminated to the Governing Board and all staff?

Q: In the event of the Clerk to the Board of Governors being unavailable, what alternative arrangements could be made?

- In a MAT framework, could a Clerk supporting another Local Governing Board be able to assist in the short-term?
- Would a Governor (not the meeting Chair) be willing and able to minute a virtual meeting?
- Could an ad-hoc Clerk be used, such as from Octavo Clerking?
- It is strongly recommended that staff, such as the Head's PA, are not asked to temporarily clerk Board meetings.

Once an organisational framework has been established, highlighting who will step into the role of Chair if and when needed, this will need to be disseminated (and updated) to all members of the Governing Board and school Senior Leadership Team. As well as dissemination by email, it is recommended that the agreed framework is uploaded onto the virtual forum currently used by Boards for the storage of key documents, such as GovernorHub, Google Drive, the secure Governor page on the school website.

If Governing Boards would like further advice, please do not hesitate in contacting [octavogovernance@octavopartnership.org](mailto:octavogovernance@octavopartnership.org) where a member of the team will be available to help.