

A Quick Guide to the Do's and Don'ts of Virtual Meetings

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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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Do's and Don'ts for Virtual Meetings

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.

This guidance has been produced to provide guidance to Boards on the Do's and Don'ts of Virtual meetings.

DO

- Remind participants of the school's IT acceptable use policy and data security policy
- Send information about how to connect to the virtual meeting to all participants in good time.
- Give participants the contact details of who can help them connect and trial the platform before the meeting. It is the school's responsibility to ensure successful means of communication are provided.
- Work with the school in a timely fashion to ensure any technical issues can be resolved before the meeting.
- Ensure virtual meetings proposed are essential and truncate the agenda business to only vital matters.
- Ensure Governor contact numbers and emails are up to date and shared.
- Consider how guest speakers, such as the School Business Manager, will connect only for their specific item.
- Consider the suitability of your location to participate in the meeting; bear in mind noise, privacy and access to electrical power and reliable wifi signal as required. Consider what is visible if video conferencing, including your own appearance.
- Ensure agenda and supporting documents are sent to participants in good time.
- Pre-reading and preparation is undertaken before the meeting – listing and sharing any questions ahead of time with the Chair will help to organise meeting time effectively.
- Notify the Chair and Clerk if you are attending late or leaving early.
- Notify the Chair and Clerk if you are not able to attend as soon as possible.
- Connect to the meeting a few minutes before the official start time.
- Monitor quorum throughout the meeting. If a connection is lost the Governor is deemed to have left the meeting until the connection is re-established.
- Be present throughout the entire meeting, not dial in for particular agenda items or just to vote.
- Agree voting process before any votes - this is especially important if there are confidential votes to be taken.

- Agree and document process for agreeing and signing minutes / documents. Agree how signed copies will reach the school.
- Keep an attendance register and note times when participants are not present, either due to joining or leaving the meeting or by technical failure, for the purpose of the minutes and quorum.
- Listen carefully, speak clearly and participate considerately, allowing all to contribute.
- Have a positive attitude to the use of new technology.
- Use email consultation to establish views on urgent items if the meeting cannot happen due to technical difficulties or is inquorate.
- Ensure your Clerk keeps all email trails of discussion and decisions made for documentation and ratification at the next Board meeting.
- Use Chair's Action if a delayed decision will have negative consequences on the school, staff or pupils.

DON'T

- Leave the Clerk out of arrangements – particularly in relation to setting up connections and emails regarding meeting software.
- Wait to be contacted if you cannot connect. Ring the organiser to find out what needs to be done.
- Expect a virtual meeting to last as long as a regular meeting.
- Expect hard copies of the agenda and papers.
- Join the meeting late (unless it has been agreed with the Chair).
- Forget that people can see your body language by webcam – maintain reasonable eye contact with the screen and beware of looking distracted. If you are using another screen, remember where the webcam is sited.
- Forget to minimise background noise – phone reminders, computer pings etc.
- Record the meeting (unless all present have given their written permission).
- Forget that the Clerk may need to interrupt to catch up or clarify information.
- Keep any documents on your personal laptop. Delete immediately.
- Forget to ensure decisions on each agenda item are made.
- Finish the meeting without agreeing how and when members will be contacted to attend the next meeting.