

NORTHUMBERLAND SCHOOL GOVERNORS NEWSLETTER

Dear Governors,

As we begin a new academic year, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to all governors and trustees across Northumberland for your continued commitment to supporting our schools and communities. Your strategic leadership remains vital as schools navigate a significant programme of national reforms, alongside local priorities focused on inclusion, safeguarding, wellbeing and educational excellence.

This term brings a number of important governance developments, including updates to safeguarding requirements through Keeping Children Safe in Education 2026, revised governance guidance for maintained schools, new statutory duties relating to allergy safety and mobile phone policies, and continuing national discussions around SEND reform and school inclusion. Governing boards will play a crucial role in ensuring schools are well prepared and compliant while maintaining a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people.

Throughout this academic year, we will continue to share practical guidance, training opportunities and governance updates designed to help you fulfil your role confidently and effectively. We hope this newsletter provides a useful overview of the key issues governing boards should have on their radar this term.

Vicki Evans



Complaints Training for School Governors

Vicki Evans will be leading training on the NCC School Complaints Procedure on the following dates;

- Monday 7th December at 12.30pm (lunch time drop in)
- Tuesday 12th January at 6pm
- Monday 1st February at 9.30am

Please sign up [here](#).

USEFUL CONTACTS

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NEWS & UPDATES- MAINTAINED SCHOOLS

Team Update

Helen Pye retired at the end of August after more than 40 years of dedicated service at NCC. Her presence will be greatly missed by both the team and the wonderful schools fortunate enough to have worked with her. Over the summer, Lizzie Jerdan joined our team and is currently undergoing training. Lizzie will primarily focus on Helen's schools and will gradually take on more responsibilities as time progresses. Welcome aboard, Lizzie!

Key Updates for Governors

Volunteer DBS Checks: What Governors Need to Know

From 1 September 2026, changes to volunteer DBS checking arrangements apply only to child-facing volunteer roles.

There are no changes for volunteers working solely with adults. Adult workforce roles remain subject to the existing criteria, with barred list checks required only where volunteers are undertaking regulated activities such as providing personal care or support.

Governor action: Seek assurance that volunteer roles have been reviewed against the new children's workforce guidance and that safer recruitment procedures have been updated where necessary.

Safeguarding Remains the Top Priority

The updated Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2026 came into force on 1 September. Governing boards should ensure safeguarding policies, training and monitoring arrangements reflect the new requirements. Key changes include:

- New expectations regarding pupils questioning their gender.
- Stronger guidance on tackling misogyny and misandry.
- Updated mobile phone requirements.
- Consideration of AI-generated content, deepfakes and online safety risks.
- Enhanced safer recruitment and DBS requirements for volunteers.
- Annual review of filtering and monitoring systems, including the impact of generative AI.

Governance Guidance Updated

The Department for Education's maintained schools governance guidance has been refreshed, placing increased emphasis on:

- Promoting pupil wellbeing and community cohesion.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion within governance.
- Securing value for money and maximising the impact of resources.
- Staff wellbeing, workload and protection from bullying and harassment.
- Sustainability and climate action planning.
- Digital and technology standards.

Governor action: Review these changes and consider how they are reflected within board priorities and strategic discussions during the year ahead.

Inclusion and SEND Reform

Nationally, inclusion remains a significant focus. The Government is currently considering responses to its SEND reform consultation and proposals outlined in the Every Child Achieving and Thriving White Paper. While no legal changes have yet taken effect, governing boards should continue to monitor developments and seek assurance that their schools are delivering effective support for pupils with SEND and other vulnerable groups.

New Allergy Safety Requirements

New statutory allergy guidance, often referred to as Benedict's Law, came into effect from September 2026. The changes strengthen schools' responsibilities for managing allergies and reducing the risk of serious allergic reactions.

Governors should seek assurance that their school has:

- An up-to-date allergy policy and procedures.
- Appropriate staff training in allergy awareness and emergency response.
- Individual healthcare plans and risk assessments where required.
- Effective communication arrangements with parents, pupils and catering providers.
- Clear processes for recording and reviewing allergy incidents and near misses.

Governor action: Boards should be satisfied that allergy management is embedded within the school's safeguarding, health and safety, and inclusion arrangements.

Mobile Phones and School Uniform Changes

Governors should be aware that:

- Schools are expected to implement policies preventing pupil access to mobile phones throughout the school day, subject to appropriate exemptions.
- New statutory limits on branded uniform items came into effect from September 2026, supporting affordability for families.

Funding and School Finance

Governors should note several funding developments including:

- Expansion of free school meal eligibility to all pupils in households receiving Universal Credit.
- The introduction of the Inclusive Mainstream Fund to support inclusive practice in schools.
- Ongoing consultations regarding future funding arrangements for schools and early years provision. Governing boards should continue to scrutinise budgets and ensure spending decisions maximise benefits for pupils.

Key Governance Priorities for the Autumn Term

The following items are already covered on the Autumn Term agenda produced by your Governance Professional. However key priorities should be;

- Review of summer attainment and progress data.
- Safeguarding updates and KCSIE assurance.
- Approval of updated safeguarding policies.
- Election of Chair and Vice-Chair where applicable.
- Review of committee structures, terms of reference and governor responsibilities.
- Confirmation of annual declarations of interest.
- Agreement of governor training priorities.
- Planning monitoring and link governor visits for the year ahead.

Governor Reflection.....

As we start the academic year, governing boards may wish to ask:

How confident are we that our safeguarding arrangements, inclusion strategy, financial planning and governance structures are fully aligned to the significant policy changes introduced this September?

Taking time to reflect on this question can help shape effective board discussions and ensure governance remains focused on what matters most: securing the best outcomes for every child



From 1 September, the newly updated Safeguarding module will be available on Learning Link. And NGA will also launch a brand new Prevent Duty module.