School governance in 2018

An annual survey by the
National Governance Association
in partnership with Tes

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The independent organisation
for school governors, trustees
and clerks

Contents

Foreword

Governors and trustees are an extraordinary and wonderful bunch. There are a quarter of a million volunteers across England giving up their time for free to act as the guardians of state schools in the interests of pupils.

But not that much is known about who they are, why they volunteer and what they think about the challenges their schools face. So the National Governance Association (NGA) is once again stepping up to fill a gap in official national data and academic research. For seven consecutive years, NGA has been running a survey of school governors and trustees in partnership with Tes, and for each of the last four years we have had more than 5,000 respondents from across England and all types of schools. The consistency of messages across these years adds a real weight to the findings.

First, a huge thank to those 5,218 individuals who made the time to complete a rather large number of questions on top of their governing duties – without you there would be no report. This is particularly impressive when you see the workload which is being reported by some, often chairs of governing boards, and the difficult decisions that have to be made, for example on budget setting and staffing implications.

It will not surprise anyone that funding, one of the governing board's three chief official responsibilities, is providing some very tough challenges. Over one quarter of respondents reported having to make at least one teaching post redundant last year, and 42% reported having to make non-teaching posts redundant. There were also a range of other reactions to funding challenges which Fay Holland covers in this report.

Sixth form provision has been particularly hit with over two thirds of governors and trustees reporting that subjects on offer have been reduced. 73% reported received insufficient high needs funding to meet the needs of their pupils with special educational needs. Only one in five respondents were confident that funding pressures could be managed without any adverse impact on the quality of education provided to children and young people. This is deeply worrying. The statistic rolls off the keyboard, so let's put it the other way round: the large majority of those who responded believe that pupils' schooling is being damaged by the funding situation. These are the people who make up the accountable body for the school or academy trust, responsible for its conduct, its budget and its offer, and they are saying in large numbers that they are unhappy with the decisions they are having to make.

There was once more a call from governors and trustees to the government to provide stability for the education system. This has been said throughout the lifetime of this survey, but accompanied by greater and greater concern about the cumulative effect of changes on school staff, their workload, the stress and their pay. Staff recruitment is reported as particularly challenging in regions surrounding London and in schools with lower Ofsted grades. The request for professionals to be valued more and listened to by policy makers came through loud and clear.

Given this context, it may be unsurprising that three quarters of governors and trustees who responded to this year's survey have a negative view of the government's performance in education over the past year. The Secretary of State for Education, Damian Hinds, came to NGA's conference this summer to thank volunteers for what they do and he heard some similar challenges then. I hope that these findings give him further food for thought. These are not generally people who are out on the streets making a fuss; they are carefully combing through governing board papers and asking questions of school leaders behind closed doors, quietly forming part of the glue which keeps our state schools running.

More governors and trustees are saying it is difficult to recruit new volunteers to the role and almost 40% now have two or more vacancies on their governing board. We need to continue to encourage younger people to govern, and particularly black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people who make up only 4% of respondents, far lower than the proportion of the adult population. At the beginning of the summer, we began a campaign called Everyone on Board to increase the diversity of governing boards and so far early signs looks positive with a far higher percentage of younger and BAME volunteers being recruited through Inspiring Governance. We urge schools with vacancies to search for potential volunteers on www.inspringgovernance.org.

NGA works to support those governing schools by providing information advice, guidance and professional development. We have had concerns that other pressures on schools have led to less time being made to engage with stakeholders: parents, pupils, staff, local employers and the broader community. We have therefore been lobbying the Department for Education to acknowledge a fourth core function of governing boards: ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders. Listening to and reporting to stakeholders is an important part of holding schools to account. We need governance to be effective, ethical and accountable. So, despite their workload and frustration with the system, three times as many respondents supported this idea of a fourth core function as opposed it.

This report is being published a few days after that of the National Association of Head Teachers' accountability commission and in the term that the Secretary of State is reviewing how accountability measures might be reformed.

I hope that this report acts as a reminder of the vital role played by governing boards in holding schools to account. Here are an enormous group of people who know a lot about state schools and are motivated to govern in order to give something back or to improve a particular school for the children and their community. Their contribution must be acknowledged and their voices heard.

Emma Knights OBE
Chief Executive,
National Governance Association

Introduction

The National Governance Association (NGA) has been running a survey of school governors and trustees in partnership with Tes since 2011. The aim of the survey is to gather the views of those who govern in order to inform and shape education policy and, in the absence of official data, to provide an overview of the state of school governance in England.

Over the years, the scope of the survey has increased and so too has the number of responses: 5,218 governors, trustees and academy committee members shared their views in this year's survey, almost four times as many as in 2012.

The findings in this report are the result of an online survey carried out between 1 May and 11 June 2018. The survey was open to anyone who governs in state-funded schools in England and was administered online through the SmartSurvey website. It was distributed directly to NGA members via emails and reminders in our weekly e-newsletter as well as being featured on the website homepage and social media. The link to the survey was also featured in articles on the Tes website. We are grateful that partners, including local authorities, local governance associations and others, also distributed the survey to their networks.

The participants in the survey were self-selecting and therefore not necessarily representative of the estimated 250,000 volunteers (figure based on the findings from 2017 NGA/Tes survey) involved in school governance nationally. However, the responses received reflect views from across a range of school types which were broadly similar to the proportion of schools of different types nationally, as shown by the chart below.

Figure one

School structures

■ Schools in England*   ■ Survey respondents
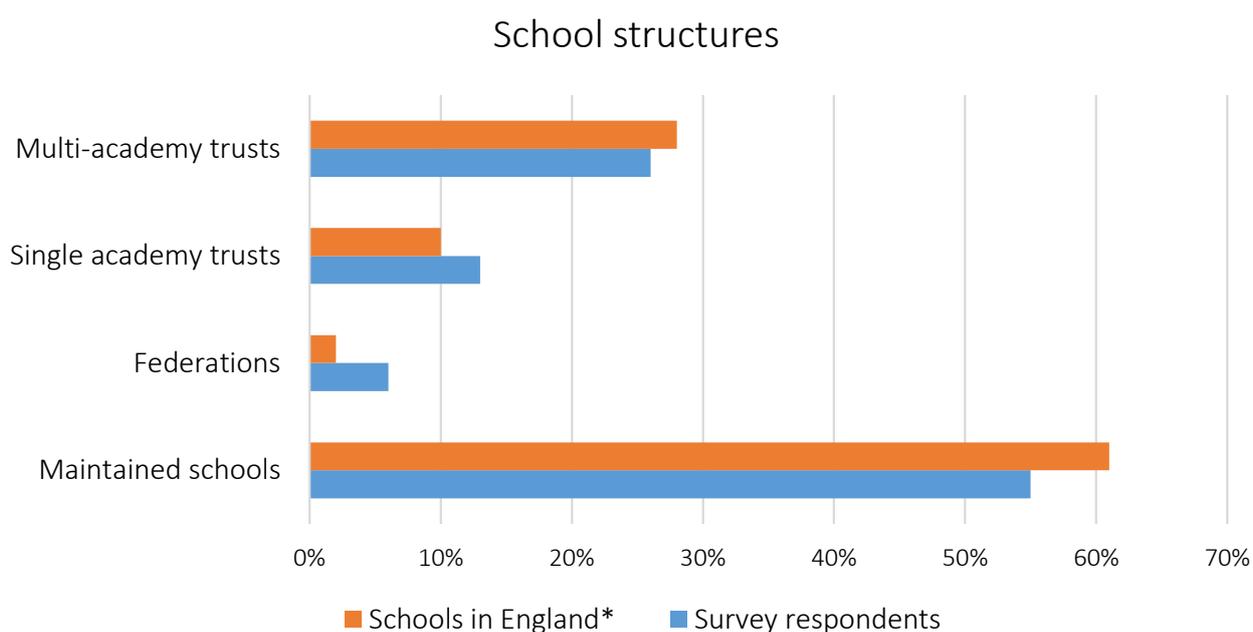
*Calculated from DfE figures (Department for Education, 2018c)

Respondents also offered perspectives from different phases of education and different parts of the country. It included responses from those new to governance (with 11% with less than 12 months' worth of governance experience) alongside those with many years' worth of experience (with 65.5% with 5 or more years' governance experience).

As many respondents were governing groups of schools with multiple phases, direct comparison between the phases of schools respondents were governing and the phases of schools nationally is not straightforward. The figures do, however, suggest that secondary schools were slightly over-represented by respondents while primary schools were slightly under-represented.

The regions in which respondents were governing were broadly in line with the proportion of schools in each region nationally, as shown by figure 2 below. Those governing in the South East are somewhat over-represented by respondents, while in all other cases the difference between the proportion of survey respondents and proportion of schools in a region was two percentage points or less.

As the survey was promoted widely (although not exclusively) across NGA's membership base, the results will be largely reflective of the experiences of NGA members: 82% of respondents said that they or their governing board were members of NGA. However, the views and experiences of NGA members, being spread across the various regions across England, are very similar to those of non-members on the majority of issues. Being the largest survey of its kind, the findings from this survey provide crucial intelligence for NGA's work representing governing boards as well as informing our guidance and training.

Governors and trustees can get involved in NGA's work throughout the year – NGA members should look out for opportunities to share their views and influence consultation responses in our weekly e-newsletter. NGA also consults members regularly at network meetings and regional and national events. Contributions to the 'In My Experience' section of Governing Matters magazine are also welcome. If you are not an NGA member, find out more at www.nga.org.uk/membership.

Figure two

Regions
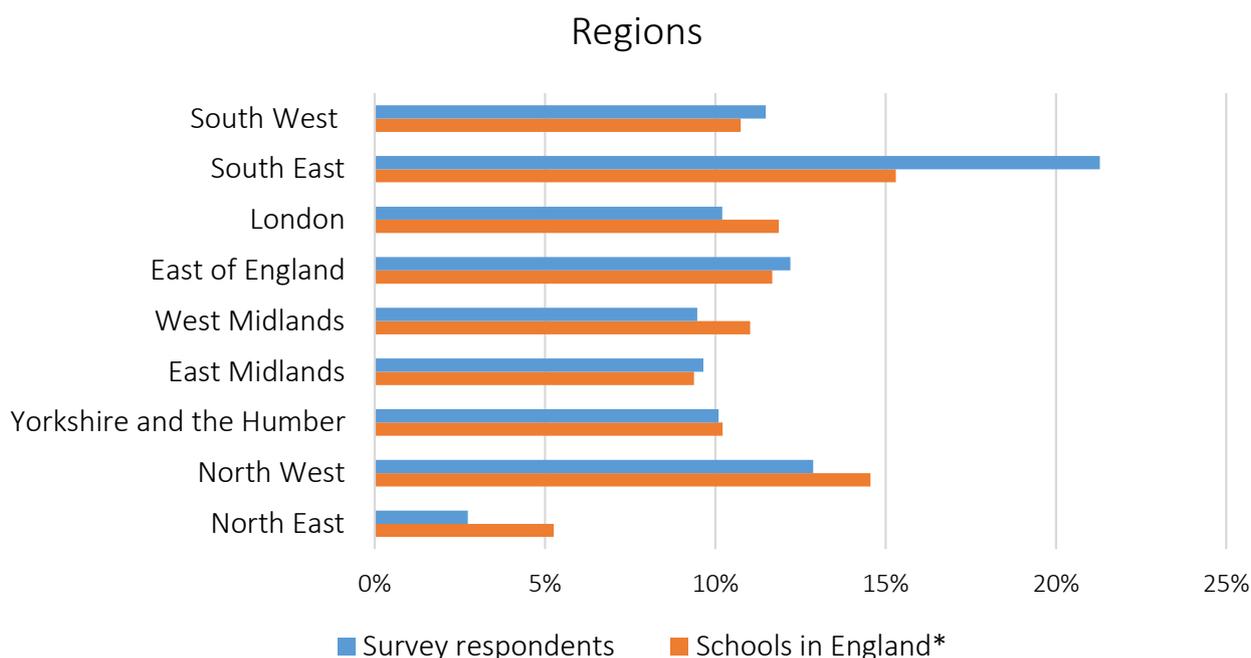
*Calculated from DfE figures (Department for Education, 2018b)

Findings and recommendations

Key findings from the 2018 school governance survey

1. Three quarters of governors and trustees have a negative view of the government's performance in education over the past year, with those governing calling for more funding and more stability in education policy.

2. Funding is the biggest issue for governing boards, especially being felt in secondary schools, sixth forms and in early years. Just one in five are confident that they can manage budget constraints without compromising the quality of education. Indeed, only half of respondents said that they were balancing income and expenditure with almost a third drawing on reserves. 75% of those drawing on reserves said these would be exhausted within two years.

3. High needs funding is a big concern, with 74% of respondents saying they disagree that current funding is sufficient; secondary schools especially are reporting being particularly badly hit.

4. Diversity on governing boards is a major concern, including when it comes to who is elected chair, and not enough boards are actively considering the issue.

5. Almost half of schools covered by the survey are providing additional services for families in need, including washing school uniforms, meals outside of term time, food banks and emergency loans. 38% of schools are providing financial support with purchasing school uniforms. This follows NGA's Spotlight on Disadvantage research report, released in June 2018, finding that 46% still allocated funds above and beyond the pupil premium for disadvantaged pupils in their school.

6. Volunteering to govern a school or group of schools is a form of professional development, yet the majority of governors and trustees are not getting paid time off work for governance.

7. The time commitment involved in governing roles is a potential barrier to some volunteers taking on or continuing governance roles, particularly when it comes to stepping up to chair.

8. Despite a trend towards smaller governing boards, recruiting volunteers to govern schools remains challenging with the number reporting two or more vacancies rising to 38% in 2018.

9. It is concerning that despite the prominence of the need for effective clerking rising in recent years, 9% of respondents still either did not have – or did not know if they had – a clerk who could provide the board with advice on governance, constitutional and procedural matters.

10. Staff recruitment is particularly challenging in regions surrounding London and in schools with lower Ofsted grades; many secondary schools are struggling to recruit teachers to core subjects.

11. Only a little over a third of standalone schools are currently considering or in the process of forming or joining a multi-academy trust or federation, meaning that, in the absence of any clear direction from central government, maintained schools are likely to make up a substantial proportion of the schools sector for the foreseeable future.

12. The majority of multi-academy trusts delegate significant responsibilities to their academy committees; this finding appears to contradict other reports in the sector that local governance is increasingly being overlooked by MATs.

13. Most multi-academy trusts have overlap between people involved in different layers of governance, which poses a risk to effective governance as individuals are effectively responsible for holding themselves to account.

14. NGA's proposal for a fourth core function of governing boards - ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders – has the support of a majority of governors and trustees with only 17% saying they did not support the proposal.

Recommendations for governing boards

Recruitment and diversity

- Consider what might motivate potential volunteers to step forward when advertising vacancies on the governing board, including ways to reach out to a more diverse audience (see section 5 for more on NGA's Everyone on Board campaign).

- Support the professional development of governors and trustees through access to training and offer help to communicate the benefits of the role to employers.

- Consider ways to make the time commitment manageable for those governing, including for chairs, for example through effective delegation or co-chairing.

Governance practice

- Single academy trusts that have large numbers of trustees and/or committees should review their governance structure to ensure that it is effective and proportionate to the needs of the organisation.

- Ensure that a code of conduct is adopted and embedded in the behaviour of the board.

- Ensure that there is a system in place for regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the governing board and recognising the contributions of individuals.

- Ensure that the lead executive reports to the governing board in the agreed format and timescale and that these reports are received at least seven days in advance of meetings.

School funding

- Write to your MP, invite them to visit the schools and meet with governors, and the Chancellor about the funding situation in your school and ask for the budget to be increased in next year's spending review.

- Support NGA's Funding the Future campaign by helping us demonstrate how budget constraints are damaging the quality of education provided to pupils across the country; to find out more, including how to get in touch, visit www.nga.org.uk/fundingthefuture.

Staffing

- Consider incentives to retain staff and measures to address unnecessary teacher workload.

- Ensure that the information reported to the board about staffing allows for the identification of potential issues.

Governing groups of schools

- Multi-academy trust boards of trustees should review their governance structures to ensure separation between the layers of governance.

Pupils and other stakeholders

- Ensure that pressure to succeed against performance measures does not lead to a narrowed curriculum in school.

- Primary school governing boards in particular should consider how pupils' awareness of future career options and aspirations are developed.

- Ensure effective and meaningful engagement with stakeholders when developing strategy and making decisions affecting pupils, staff and parents.

Recommendations for the Department of Education

- Urgently address the insufficiency of the schools budget and other prominent issues, such as teacher recruitment and retention, to protect children's futures.

- Guarantee a period of stability to allow recent changes to curriculum and assessment to bed in.

School funding

- Increase the overall schools budget in the next spending review to ensure that all schools are able to offer pupils the standard of education they deserve.

- Address the shortfall in high needs funding which puts the education of pupils with special educational needs at risk.

- Reverse cuts to sixth forms and invest in early years.

- Consider the impact of cuts to local authority services (both school improvement and children's services) on schools and on pupils' readiness for learning.

Staffing:

- Continue to look at mechanisms to address teacher recruitment shortages particularly for areas surrounding London.

Groups of schools:

- Recognise that many governing boards have chosen to remain maintained or not to join multi-academy trusts and ensure that policies are designed to support all school types on an equal basis.

Pupils and other stakeholders

- Ensure that performance measures support a broad and balanced curriculum providing all children with rounded opportunities to learn and develop.

- Focus on preventing child poverty to reduce the need for schools to offer services for families such as food banks.

Governance and government

Despite their vital role, the views of those governing schools are often overlooked in conversations about national education policy. To redress this, the survey asked for respondents' views on the overall performance of the government on education issues and on the key issues this and future governments should be addressing.

NGA is a not-for-profit social enterprise, a charity and a company limited by guarantee. We aim to improve the educational welfare of children and young people in England by promoting high standards in all our state funded schools and improving the effectiveness of their governing boards. NGA is not aligned to any political party; we work closely with, and lobby, government and major educational bodies to ensure that the views of governors and trustees are fully represented in the national arena.

Three quarters of governors and trustees have a negative view of the government's performance in education over the past year

We asked respondents to give their verdict on how the government has performed in education over the past year. While 15% recorded a positive verdict, it is striking that 75% felt negatively about it (the remaining 10% had no view).

Figure three

Give your verdict on how the government has performed in education over the past year

| 3% | 11% | 10% | 33% | 42% |

■ Very positive ■ Slightly positive ■ No view ■ Slightly negative ■ Very negative
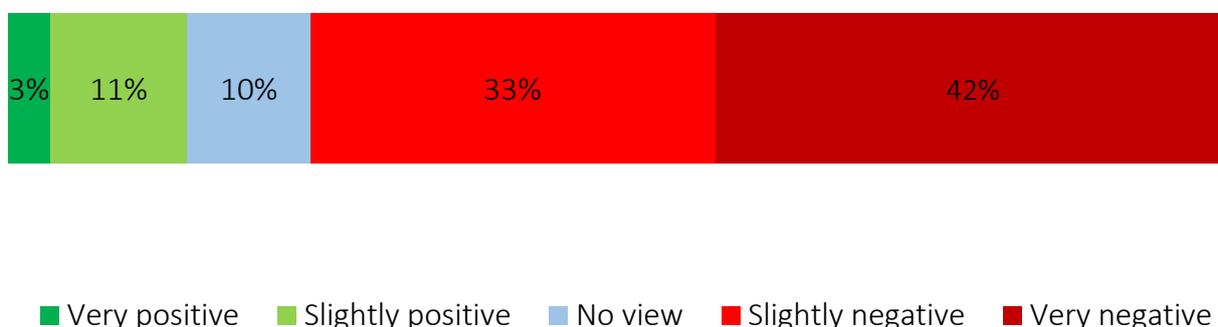
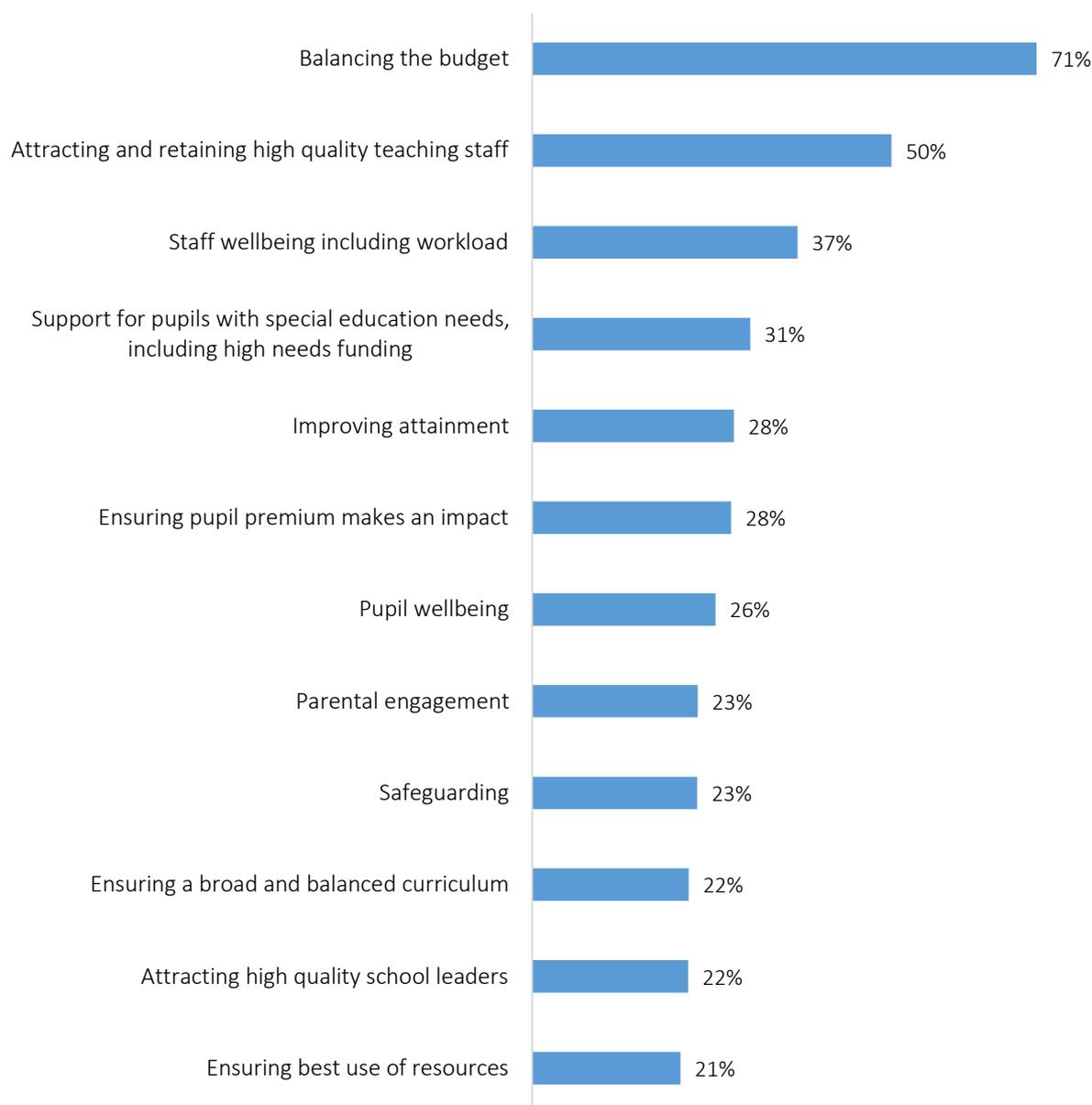So what are the issues influencing these responses?

Balancing the budget was the biggest issue facing governing boards

It will surprise few in the education sector that 'balancing the budget' was cited by the greatest number of respondents as among the five most important issues facing the schools they governed, with 71% picking it out.

The next most frequently cited issue was 'attracting and retaining high quality teaching staff', with 51% selecting this option (more discussion of staff recruitment and retention follows in section 9). 'Staff wellbeing including workload' came in third at 37% followed by 'support for pupils with special educational needs including high needs funding' at 31% and both 'improving attainment' and 'ensuring pupil premium makes an impact' at 28%.

Figure four

What do you see as the most important issues facing the school(s) you govern? Please select up to five.

Issue	Percentage
Balancing the budget	71%
Attracting and retaining high quality teaching staff	50%
Staff wellbeing including workload	37%
Support for pupils with special education needs, including high needs funding	31%
Improving attainment	28%
Ensuring pupil premium makes an impact	28%
Pupil wellbeing	26%
Parental engagement	23%
Safeguarding	23%
Ensuring a broad and balanced curriculum	22%
Attracting high quality school leaders	22%
Ensuring best use of resources	21%

Issues selected by more than 20% of respondents shown on chart.

The survey invited free text responses to the question "What is the one thing the government should do to improve the school system in the next year?" By far and away the most frequently identified action was increasing the overall amount of funding in the schools budget, which was the main issue identified in 1,640 of the 3,431 responses (48%).[1] For example:

> " Provide additional per pupil funding to ensure good quality education can be provided to all. "

> " Increase funding to ensure all pupils get the best possible education. "

There were a further 227 governors and trustees (7%) identifying allocation of funding as their main ask, for example:

> " Relook at how the funding is calculated and ensure it's a fairer system. "

The next most frequent ask was for stability in the school system which 447 respondents called for (13%), for example:

> " Cut the pace of changes to the curriculum, give them time to bed in first, allow the staff to receive training. "

> " Ensure schools can plan in a long-term sustainable way rather than the current aim for short-term gains. "

A wide range of other topics commented on included reducing emphasis on testing pupils, listening to professionals and other stakeholders, high needs funding and pressures stemming from the accountability system.

While most governors and trustees are satisfied with Ofsted's report on their schools, opinion is split on the impact of the inspection system generally

Perhaps reflecting that Ofsted inspections were among the most important issues for just 15% of respondents, the majority of respondents (78%) agreed that the most recent Ofsted report(s) gave a fair and accurate picture of the school(s) they govern. Unsurprisingly, those governing 'outstanding' schools were most likely to agree (83%). Those governing schools judged 'requires improvement' were least likely to agree (61%) followed by those governing 'inadequate' schools (64%).

Despite this, opinion was split among respondents on whether the inspection system has a positive impact on the school system as a whole: 44% agreed that the impact was positive while 41% disagreed (the remaining 15% had no view).

Again, responses varied with the Ofsted judgements of the schools respondents were governing at: 48% of those governing 'outstanding' schools agreed that the impact of inspection was positive, compared to 45% of those governing 'good' schools, 39% of those governing 'requires improvement' schools and 37% of those governing 'inadequate' schools.

Over the past several years, NGA has been discussing potential ways of improving the inspection system with members and networks, including the changes to inspection of 'good' schools and the possibility of removing the exemption from inspection for 'outstanding' schools, something that Her Majesty's Chief Inspector has also said that Ofsted would like to review. We will continue to consult and promote governors' and trustees' views ahead of the new school inspection framework expected in September 2019.

Recommendations for the Department of Education

- Urgently address the insufficiency of the schools budget and other prominent issues, such as teacher recruitment and retention, to protect children's futures.

- Guarantee a period of stability to allow recent changes to curriculum and assessment to bed in.

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1 Where more than one issue was mentioned by a respondent, the response was categorised by the first issue mentioned.

Who governs our schools?

As no official statistics on the demographics of those governing schools are available, the survey is our best source of information on this topic. As in previous years and in other sectors, the responses indicate that diversity is a major challenge for governing boards.

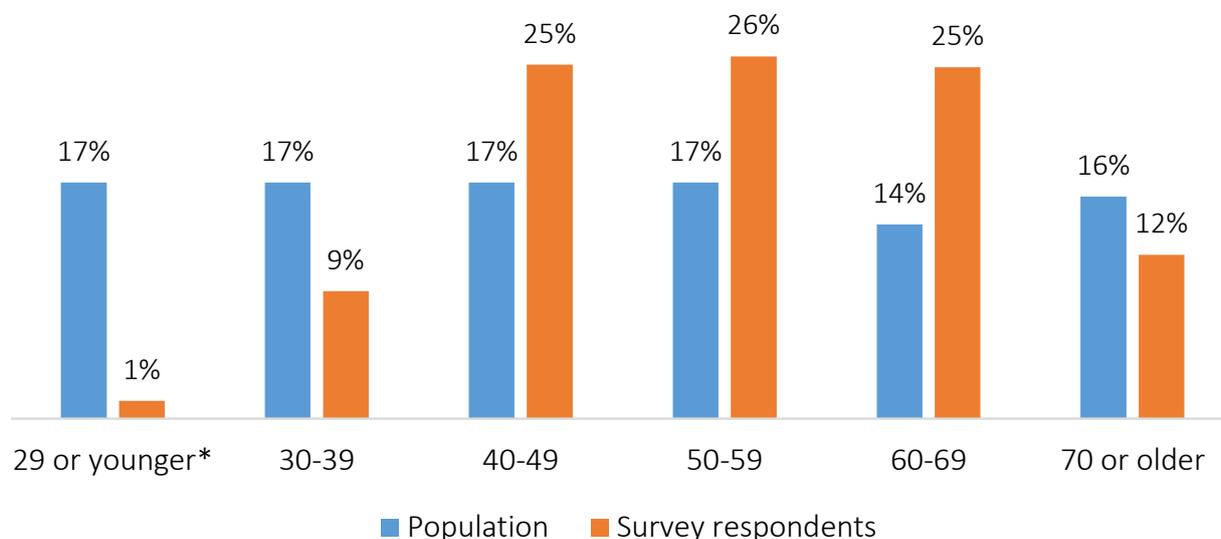## Younger people continue to be underrepresented in school governance

Since the question was first asked in 2015, the proportion of respondents who were under 30 has consistently been 1%, with the proportion who are under 40 consistently being between 10% and 12%.

The figure below shows the age distribution of survey respondents compared to the adult population of England. While we might expect that fewer people in their twenties volunteer to govern as they are less likely to have school-age children (30% of survey respondents were a parent/carer of a child at the school(s) at which they governed), the proportion was no higher in nursery and primary schools than secondary and was actually lower in infant schools (<0.5%). Having less professional experience and less time than those who are retired are other reasons that younger people may be less likely to volunteer. This does, however, mean that schools are missing out on the perspectives of those with more recent experience of the education system and young people are missing out on a valuable opportunity for personal and professional development.

Figure five

Ages of survey respondents compared to adult population of England

Age group	Population	Survey respondents
29 or younger*	17%	1%
30-39	17%	9%
40-49	17%	25%
50-59	17%	26%
60-69	14%	25%
70 or older	16%	12%

■ Population ■ Survey respondents

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2017a
*Population statistics for age group 20-29, survey respondents for age group 18-29

Young Governors' Network

The Young Governors' Network (YGN) aims to support and encourage those aged under 40 to govern in schools by facilitating them to share their experiences, addressing the challenges faced by young people governing schools and creating sustainable connections among current and prospective governors. YGN is member-led: created and run by young governors with support from the NGA and Inspiring Governance. YGN is a community of interested, intelligent, creative and questioning young people committed to improving schools for everyone.

To find out more visit www.nga.org.uk/YGN

Lack of ethnic diversity is an issue for governing boards

As in previous years, the proportion of respondents who gave their ethnic group as white was higher than that of both the general population and the pupil population of state-funded schools in England. All other ethnic groups were underrepresented.

Figure six

Table showing ethnicity of survey respondents compared to population and to pupils in schools

Region	% of survey respondents (2018	% of population (2011 census)	% of primary and secondary students (as of Jan 2018)
White	93%	86%	74%
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	1%	3%	6%
Asian/Asian British	2%	8%	12%
Mixed/multiple ethnic groups	1%	2%	6%
Other ethnic group	1%	1%	2%

There were notable differences in the responses of governors and trustees between regions: 82% of respondents in London identified their ethnicity as white compared to 98% of those in the North East.

It is particularly concerning that respondents from ethnic groups other than white were less likely to be in leadership positions on the governing board. 31% of white respondents were chair, compared to 24% from mixed or multiple ethnic groups, 19% of Asian or Asian British respondents, 17% of those who selected 'other ethnic group' and just 9% of respondents who were black, African, Caribbean or black British. This suggests that those from underrepresented backgrounds are not being elected to lead the board as often as their peers and that there might be a particular problem around black governors and trustees progressing to chair.

A majority of those governing are female but smaller proportions are chairing boards, particularly among secondary schools and multi-academy trusts

Reflecting the schools workforce, a majority of the governors, trustees and academy committee members responding to the survey were female: 61%. The proportion of chairs who were female was slightly lower at 58%. However, it is more notable that among chairs of multi-academy trusts the proportion who were female dropped to 42%.

There were also some differences between phases of school: 62% of those governing primary schools were female compared to 53% of those governing secondary schools. A similar pattern was seen among chairs, with 59% of primary school chairs being female compared to 48% of secondary school chairs.

The finding that women make up a high proportion of those governing but are underrepresented in leadership positions mirrors the school workforce overall, and differences in the school workforce between primary and secondary (Department for Education, 2018a).

People with a disability appear to be underrepresented in school governance

This was the first year in which respondents were asked whether they consider themselves to have a disability. Just 5% said that they did, which is far lower than the 22% of people that reported a disability in the government's Family Resources Survey 2016/17, including 19% of working-age adults and 45% of State Pension age adults (Department for Work & Pensions, 2018). This could be because responses were based on respondents' own definitions of disability, which may not be aligned with that of the government. It may, however, also indicate that people with a disability experience more barriers to volunteering as school governors and trustees. Ensuring that school governance roles are accessible to people with disabilities is an area for future work.

Figure seven

Percentage of female resondents in different roles on the governing board, broken down by phase
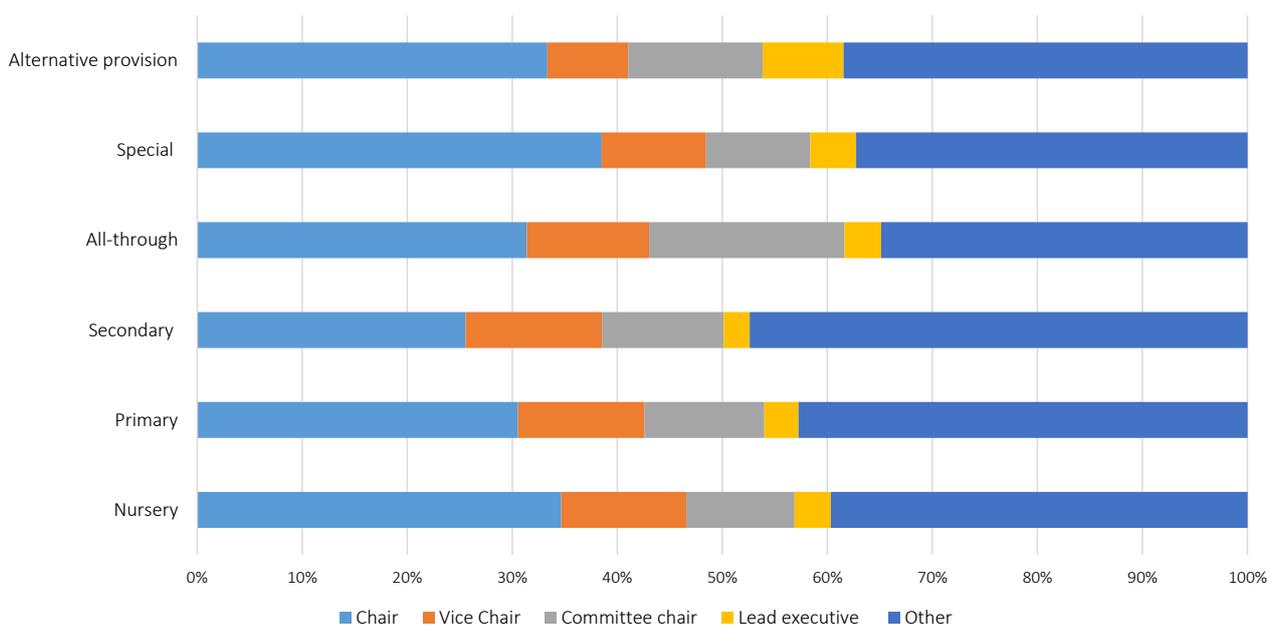
The majority of those governing have professional or managerial backgrounds
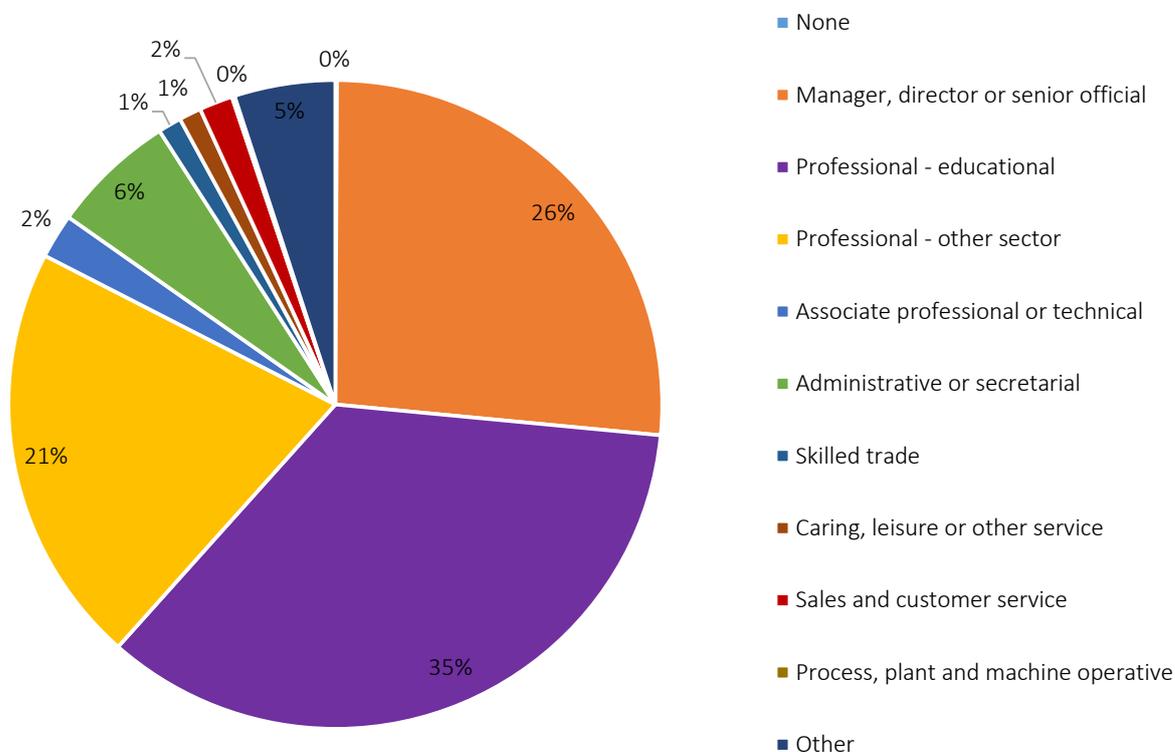
Just over half of the governors and trustees who responded to the survey were employed (51%) and a further 13% were self-employed. Almost a third were retired (30%) while the remainder were looking after home or family (5%) or unemployed/studying (1%).

The pattern was broadly similar across all school types but it is worth noting that those governing groups of schools were most likely to be retired (37% of multi-academy trust trustees and 34% of federation governors).

The majority of respondents to the survey gave their current or previous occupation as either manager, director or senior official (26%), educational professional (35%) or professional from another sector (21%). The high proportion of educational professionals involved in school governance is a new finding this year as previous surveys have not separated this out from professional roles in other sectors.

Figure eight

Which of the following best describes your current or previous occupation?

- None
- Manager, director or senior official
- Professional - educational
- Professional - other sector
- Associate professional or technical
- Administrative or secretarial
- Skilled trade
- Caring, leisure or other service
- Sales and customer service
- Process, plant and machine operative
- Other

For comparison, less than a third of the employed population of the UK were in managerial or professional occupations when the latest figures were published in 2017 (Office for National Statistics, 2017b).

This suggests that those governing are able to bring a wealth of skills and experience to their role. Diversity of professional and educational backgrounds is also important to ensure good governance, however, and it is worth considering whether a range of perspectives are represented on the governing board; it should not be assumed that a potential volunteer has nothing to offer because they do not have a professional or managerial background.

Not enough governing boards are actively considering diversity

For the first time, we asked respondents whether their governing board had considered how well they reflect the community they serve. Less than half (47%) of respondents said that they had done so in the past year, while even fewer (39%) had taken steps to increase the diversity of the governing board.

Everyone on Board

NGA's Everyone on Board campaign aims to increase the participation of people from ethnic minorities and young people in school governance by encouraging them to share their skills, experience and insights as school governors/trustees. Creating a diverse governing board has multiple benefits:

- It helps to avoid groupthink by offering a range of perspectives
- It sets a culture for equality and diversity to thrive throughout the school or group of schools
- Seeing governors and trustees from ethnic minorities provides role models for young people and can give them confidence in what they can achieve
- Having a diverse governing board provides a connectedness between the school and its community and ensures all stakeholders feel valued

To find out more, visit www.nga.org.uk/everyone-on-board

Recommendations for governing boards

- Actively consider diversity of age, ethnic group, gender and disability when recruiting to the governing board or succession planning for the role of chair and work to identify and remove barriers to participation.

- Put in place a mentoring or 'buddy' scheme to support governors and trustees from underrepresented groups to progress to leadership roles on the governing board.

Recommendations for the Department for Education

- Continue to support initiatives aimed at increasing diversity on governing boards and ensure messaging supports this aim.

Why govern? Motivations and barriers

Respondents to the survey had been selected for their roles on the governing board through different routes: some were co-opted to the board (49%), co-opted following nomination by the local authority (12%), appointed by a diocese or foundation body (13%), elected by the parent body (18%), elected by staff (5%) or held the position ex-officio through the role of headteacher (2%).

School governors and trustees volunteer for a range of reasons but most want to make a difference for children

Respondents were asked what motivated them to become involved in school governance and were able to select multiple answers. The table below shows that there are a whole range of reasons that people put themselves forward, but the desire to make a difference for children is central. The next most popular motivations were utilising existing skills and experience and serving the community.

A minority volunteered because of wanting to develop skills for their professional life (although a higher proportion recognise that they have done so – see page 18) or because of the encouragement of their employer, suggesting that this is perhaps an underexploited way of finding new recruits.

It is perhaps unsurprising that a significant proportion were motivated to get involved with schools that their children or grandchildren attend; 30% of all respondents were a parent or carer of children at the school(s) at which they govern, exceeding the 18% who were elected to the board by the parent body.

It is worth bearing in mind that almost a third of respondents were motivated to get involved in school governance because they were asked, showing that a personal approach can still be a powerful tool in governing board recruitment.

Figure nine

What motivated you to become involved in school governance?	
Making a difference for children	67%
Utilise existing skills and experience	61%
Serving my community	60%
Interest in education	56%
Interest in governance	38%
Work/worked in education	37%
Children/grandchildren attend	34%
School in need of support	31%
I was asked to join	29%
To develop skills for my professional life	20%
To learn about education in order to support my child/children	14%
A connection with the Church	12%
Encouragement of a relative or friend who governs	7%
Encouragement of employer	5%
Other	5%
Attended the school	4%

Most volunteers only serve on one governing board

We asked respondents whether they had previously or currently been part of other governing boards. Just over half (54%) had not, while almost a third (31%) had previously been part of another governing board but only currently governed in one school. Of the remainder, a minority currently governed on two (12%) or more (4%) governing boards while an even smaller proportion (6%) had experience of governance outside of the school sector.

School governance is a valuable form of professional development

We asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed that through school governance they had gained or developed skills that are valuable in their professional lives.
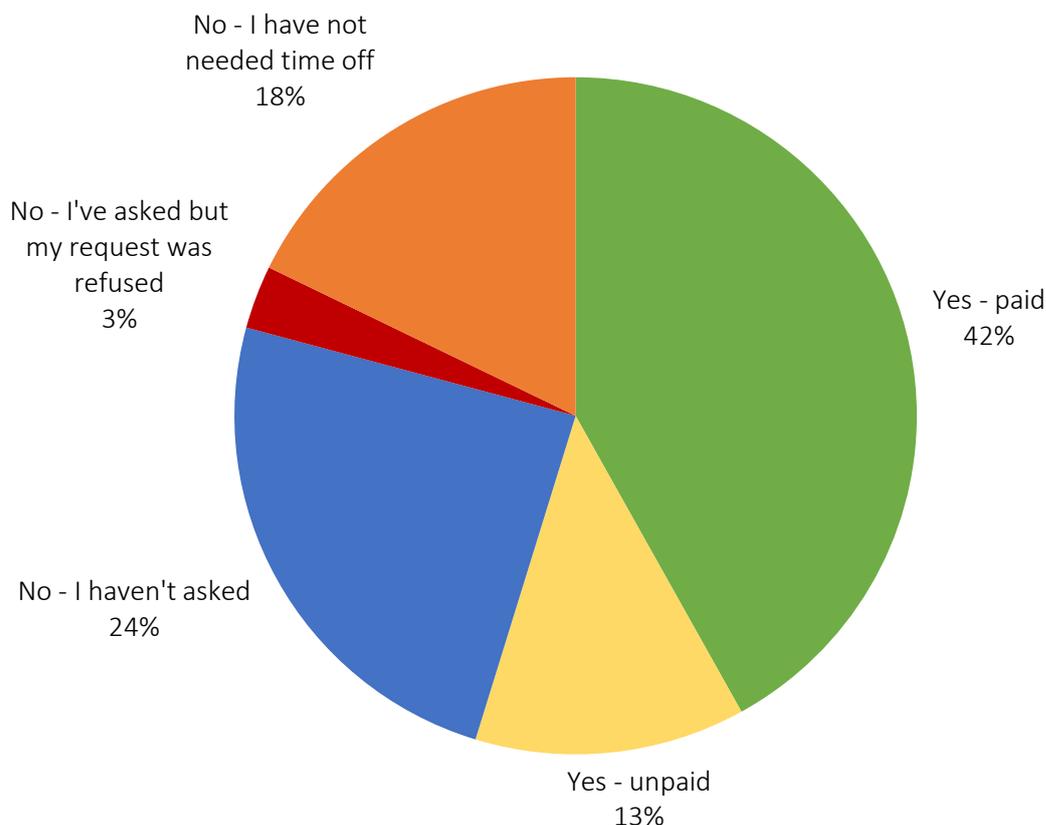
67% of all respondents and 76% of those in employment agreed that it did (just 10% disagreed while the remainder had no view).

It is notable that the perceived benefit declined with the age of respondents, emphasising that as well as improving governance by providing different perspectives, younger people have a lot to gain by becoming involved in school governance.

However, 75% of respondents who are currently managers, directors or senior officials agreed that they had gained or developed skills that are valuable in their professional lives through school governance, which indicates that volunteers can benefit professionally from volunteering at any point in their careers.

Figure ten

Does your employer give you time off work for governance?

No - I have not needed time off
18%

No - I've asked but my request was refused
3%

No - I haven't asked
24%

Yes - paid
42%

Yes - unpaid
13%

The majority of governors and trustees are not getting paid time off work for governance

Despite the benefits of governing as a form of professional development, the majority of employed governors and trustees are not getting paid time off work to carry out the role. Respondents who were employed were asked whether their employer gave them time off work to complete their governance duties. 42% said that they receive paid time off work, a slight decline from the 46% who said the same in response to the 2016 survey. 13% had taken unpaid time off to complete their governance duties, while 18% had not needed time off.

Just 3% reported having a request for time off refused while almost a quarter had not asked. There may therefore be scope for those governing to be more assertive when tackling the issue with employers. NGA will continue to promote the benefits of supporting employees to govern as a form of professional development, as well as social responsibility, and those governing should make it part of conversations about their own development.

The time commitment can be a barrier, particularly when it comes to stepping up to chair

We asked all respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'the responsibilities given to governors/trustees are manageable within 10 to 20 equivalent days per year'. Just over half (52% agreed) but this varied considerably with their role on the governing board, with chairs the least likely to agree (42%) followed by vice chairs (50%), committee chairs (56%) and other governing board members (60%). This is a major concern, as if these roles are perceived as unmanageable, fewer volunteers are likely to step forward which could create a risk for the effectiveness of school governance overall.

When comparing school types, respondents who were trustees of multi-academy trusts were the least likely to agree that the responsibilities were manageable within 10 to 20 days per year (47% agreed). This could suggest that one of the potential benefits of new school structures – the opportunity for more strategic and effective governance – is not being realised. A different picture is seen when the responses of chairs are looked at by school type, however: chairs of maintained schools (39%) and federations (36%) were less likely to agree than chairs of multi-academy trusts (40%).

When we speak to longstanding chairs, we are often told that they have not stood down because no one else on the board wishes to take on the role. It is therefore important to understand the reasons why others might choose not to put themselves forwards.

We asked respondents who were not chairs, lead executives or staff governors whether they would consider chairing: 36% said they would (although only 7% were actively hoping to take on the role). 10% had previously been chair, 17% were not interested in the role but the most prominent reason for not taking it on was time: 33% said they would not consider it as they did not have enough time to commit.

Future Chairs – the succession solution for governing boards

Future Chairs is a free recruitment service, brought to you by Inspiring Governance and the National Governance Association, designed to help governing boards find volunteers with the right skills and willingness to take on the role in the near future. The service connects boards that expect to have a requirement for a chair, vice-chair or committee chair within 12 to 18 months with appropriately experienced and skilled individuals who have the potential to lead a school governing board or committee. These individuals are not new to chairing or senior and strategic roles but may be new to education.

To find out more, visit www.nga.org.uk/future-chairs

Despite the time commitment, most governors and trustees do not think it should be a paid role

Despite the demands of the role and the time commitment required, most governors and trustees do not think it should be a paid role. 29% of respondents agreed that there should be an option to pay those governing (in addition to receiving expenses), while 52% disagreed and 19% had no view. Support for paying the chair of the governing board was slightly lower, with 25% agreeing that chairing should be a paid role (again, in addition to expenses).

Support for paying governors and trustees has remained between a quarter and a third since NGA began asking the question in annual surveys in 2012. NGA's view is that those governing, including chairs, should not be paid.

Governors and trustees describe their experience as challenging, interesting and rewarding

We asked survey respondents to sum up their experience of governing in one word. The responses reflected an enriching but demanding role; the most frequently chosen words are shown below:

Figure eleven

brilliant busy **challenging** complex
consuming demanding difficult educational
encouraging engaging enjoyable
enlightening enriching excellent exciting
exhausting exhilarating extensive eye-opening fantastic
fascinating frustrating fulfilling
hard hardwork informative insightful inspiring intense
interesting
mixed overwhelming
positive privilege responsibility
rewarding rollercoaster satisfying
stimulating stressful supportive thankless time-consuming
tiring tough valuable varied wonderful work worthwhile

Recommendations for governing boards

- Consider what might motivate potential volunteers to step forward when advertising vacancies on the governing board, including ways to reach out to a more diverse audience (see section 5 for more on NGA's Everyone on Board campaign).

- Support the professional development of governors and trustees through access to training and offer help to communicate the benefits of the role to employers.

- Consider ways to make the time commitment manageable for those governing, including for chairs, for example through effective delegation or co-chairing.

Governance practice

Recruiting volunteers to govern schools is increasingly challenging

There has been a small but steady increase in the proportion of respondents reporting difficulty recruiting governors or trustees to their board over the past several years. The proportion reporting difficulty attracting a good chair or vice chair has declined slightly compared with 2017, though it had been increasing slightly over the two previous years.

This is reflected in the number of governing board vacancies that respondents are reporting. In 2016, 42% of respondents had no vacancies but this had dropped by six percentage points to 36% in 2018. It is especially concerning that the growth has been in the proportion of boards with two or more vacancies, which has risen from 31% in 2016 to 38% in 2018 while the proportion with one vacancy actually declined by two percentage points from 28% to 26% in the same period.

The survey also gives some insight into the recruitment process governing boards adopt, including use of national recruitment services. 25% of respondents had used Governors for Schools (formerly SGOSS) as part of their recruitment. A smaller proportion (16%) had used Inspiring Governance which may reflect the fact that this is a newer service and it is encouraging that the proportion of respondents who have used the service has increased year on year. Just 5% of respondents had used Academy Ambassadors but this is not surprising as the service is aimed at multi-academy trust boards – 36% of MAT trustees said that their board had used the service. Interestingly, MAT trustees were also most likely to have used each of the other two services.

43% of respondents said that their governing board had formally interviewed governors and trustees in the course of the previous year.

Inspiring Governance

Inspiring Governance is a free, online service that connects volunteers who are interested in becoming governors and trustees with schools that need them. Whether you have a current vacancy to fill or you just want to browse, Inspiring Governance gives you access to volunteers from your community that want to become a governor or trustee and free support is provides to your appointees by NGA. Our innovative mapping technology lets you connect with volunteers based on their location and skills. Inspiring Governance is available to all state-funded schools in England that need to recruit governors or trustees, and is used by thousands of chairs and clerks of governing boards.

To find out more, visit www.inspiringgovernance.org

The trend towards smaller governing boards continues but there are differences between school structures

Since we began asking about the size of respondents' governing boards in 2013, there has been a trend towards smaller boards. The proportion with governing boards of up to 10 has risen from 17% in 2013 to 38% in 2018. This is unsurprising given that recent Department for Education ministers have championed smaller boards.

Part of the reduction in size of governing boards may have been driven by the increasing number of schools that are in multi-academy trusts (MATs), as survey responses indicate that MATs are likely to have smaller boards: 57% of MAT trustees responding to this year's survey said that they have up to 10 people on the board and 55% of those on local academy committees said the same, compared to 34% of those governing standalone maintained schools. The most common size for a board is eleven or twelve members.

Single academy trusts tend to have larger boards, with 18% having 16 to 19 trustees and a further 6% having 20 or more. Breaking this down further, secondary single academy trusts tend to have larger boards than primaries; with 53% of single academy trust secondary schools having 13 or more trustees compared to 35% of primaries. This is likely to be because many are secondary schools, but also because maintained schools had to reconstitute their boards under the 2012 Constitution Regulations, while academies have had the freedom to remain larger. Federations were the next most likely to have larger boards.

Despite these trends, the responses show that there is a range of practice when it comes to board sizes across all school structures and more research is required to determine the impact on governing board effectiveness.

Figure twelve

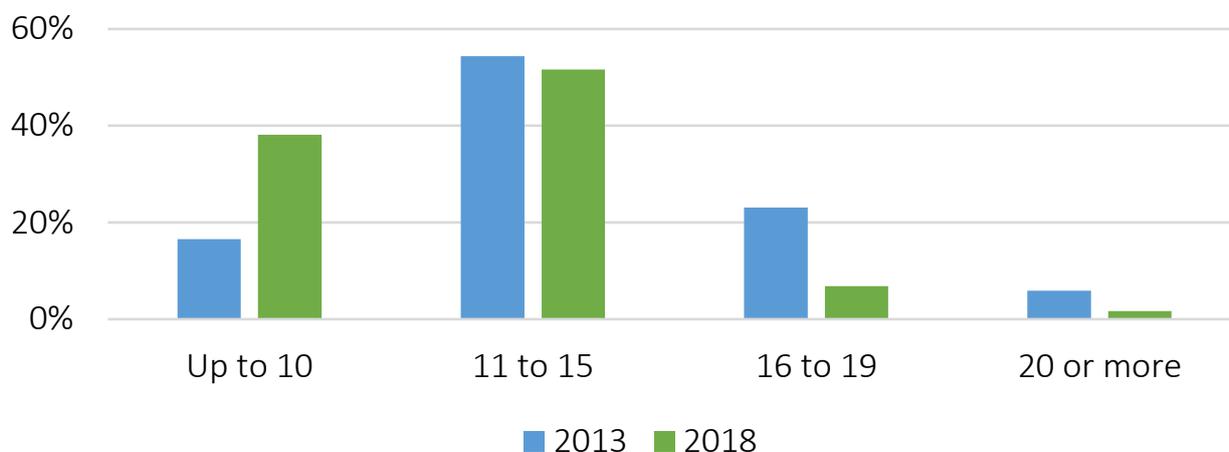## How many governors/trustees do you have on your governing board when full (excluding associate members)?

2013   2018

Figure thirteen

How many governors/trustees do you have on your governing board when full (excluding associate members)?					
	Maintained school	Federation	Single academy trust	Academy committee in MAT	Multi-academy trust (MAT)
8 or fewer	9%	9%	7%	25%	23%
9-10	25%	19%	17%	30%	34%
11-12	36%	27%	26%	26%	29%
13-15	22%	30%	24%	12%	9%
16-19	5%	10%	18%	4%	3%
20 or more	1%	2%	6%	1%	1%
Don't know	2%	3%	3%	2%	1%

Governing with fewer or no committees is on the rise

Another trend observable in the survey results is that an increasing proportion of boards are governing with fewer or no committees (excluding academy committees within a multi-academy trust and panels which have to be set up when required for employment issues, exclusions and performance management etc.). While 21% of respondents said they had five or more committees in 2013, this had dropped to 7% in 2018. The proportion with no committees rose from 2% to 12% over the same period.

The most popular number of committees overall was three to four, selected by 43% of respondents to the 2018 survey, followed by one to two which was the case for 36% of respondents.

It is perhaps unsurprising that academy committees within a multi-academy trust, which are themselves committees of the trust board, are the most likely to operate without any sub-committees: 28% did so, compared to 9% of maintained schools governing bodies, 8% of multi-academy trust boards, 7% of federation governing bodies and 4% of single academy trust boards.

Mirroring the fact that they tend to have larger boards, single academy trusts were the most likely to have five or more committees, with this being the case for 13% of trustees of single academy trusts and a further 55% having three to four. Again, federations were the next most likely to have a larger number of committees, with 10% having five or more and 43% having three to four.

NGA is aware of a range of practice when it comes to the committee structures of different types of schools, for example in our case studies of multi-academy trusts (available at www.nga.org.uk/MATlessonslearned). Guidance on committee structures is available in the NGA Guidance Centre www.nga.org.uk/guidance.

While some volunteers are spreading expertise around the system, some are not taking good practice on time limits seriously
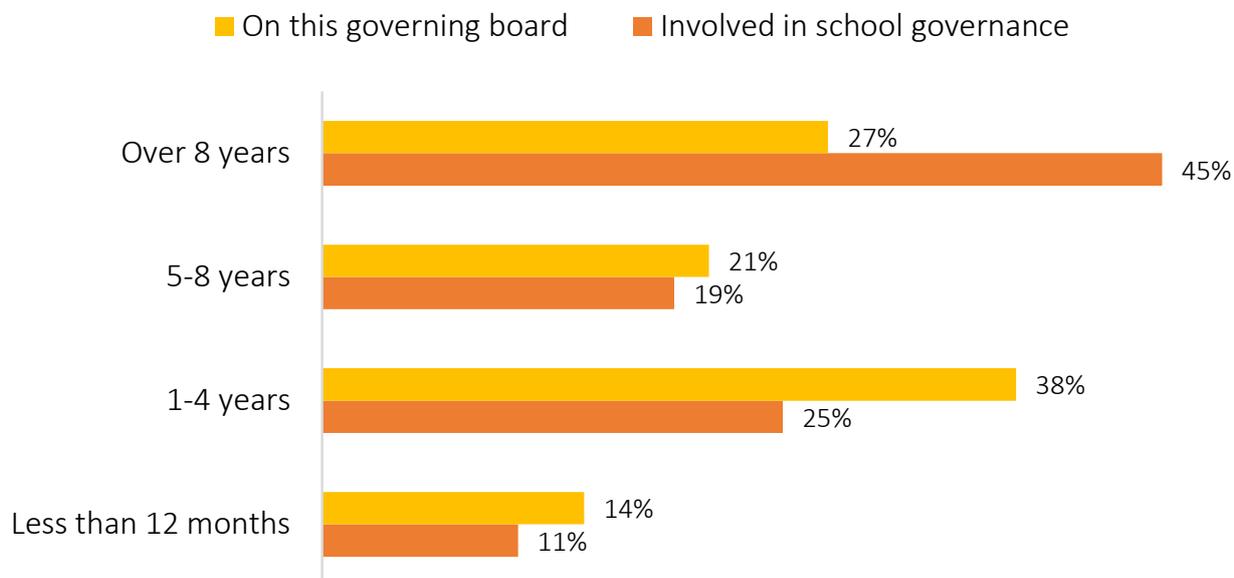
We asked respondents how long they had been involved in school governance as well as how long they had been on their current governing board. In line with good practice in the charity sector, NGA thinks that those governing should serve no more than two terms of office (eight years) in any one school. Over a quarter of respondents (27%) had exceeded this length of time in their current school,

suggesting that this recommendation is not being taken as seriously as it deserves.

A higher proportion (45%) have been involved in school governance for more than eight years, suggesting that there are volunteers recognising the need to move on and taking the expertise they have gained to benefit other governing boards, something which should be celebrated.

Figure fourteen

How long have you been

■ On this governing board   ■ Involved in school governance

- Over 8 years: 27% / 45%
- 5-8 years: 21% / 19%
- 1-4 years: 38% / 25%
- Less than 12 months: 14% / 11%

Similarly, NGA's view is that an element of regular reappraisal and renewal is beneficial to all schools and that all chairs should normally expect to step down after a maximum of six years in post. 19% of respondents who were chairs had been leading their governing board for over six years, again indicating that the importance of this recommendation has not been universally recognised. The majority are, however, within the recommended term of office: the most frequently cited length of time respondents had been chair was one to three years.

This is not to say that the contribution of long standing volunteers is not to be valued but moving on to govern at a new school can help to retain the appropriate level of objectivity while using the skills and experience gained to benefit a whole new group of pupils.

A significant proportion of governing boards have not agreed a code of conduct in the past year

Just under three quarters of survey respondents said that they had agreed a code of conduct in the past year. It is possible that some of the remainder had an existing code of conduct which had not been reviewed or re-adopted in the past year.

NGA's view is that all governing boards should adopt a code of conduct which is rooted in the seven 'Nolan principles' of public life, which should include clear strategies for dealing with conflicts of interest. Agreeing this annually can help to ensure that ethical governance and standards of conduct remain central to the way the board operates.

Governing boards can do more when it comes to reviewing their effectiveness

Governing boards have a crucial role to play in the leadership of schools and therefore reviewing their performance and identifying areas for improvement, as well as strengths to celebrate and preserve, is important.

There are various practices that can contribute to a culture of continuous review and improvement and responses to our survey suggest that many governing boards are missing these opportunities.

The most frequently used method was carrying out a skills audit which 86% of respondents said their board had done in the past year. This has increased gradually over time, from 72% of respondents in 2012, and is now well embedded in most governing boards' practice. The top uses for skills audit were recruitment (56%), assigning governors or trustees to committees (54%), training (45%) and succession planning (45%).[2]

58% of respondents said their governing board had carried out an internal self-review of governance in the past year, while 27% had carried out an external review of governance.

Of those included in the survey, the least commonly adopted practice was performance managing governors or trustees in their role, which just 13% of respondents said had been done on their governing board in the past year. There is some hesitance in the sector to performance manage those governing, perhaps because they are volunteers rather than paid staff, but volunteers are performance managed in many key roles in the public and charity sectors. Performance management can be a supportive, developmental conversation and a powerful tool for identifying opportunities for training and improving the way the board works. It can help to improve retention by ensuring that individuals feel their contribution is noticed and appreciated.

The services of clerks are obtained through a range of means

The vast majority of respondents (91%) had a clerk who can provide the governing board with advice on governance, constitutional and procedural matters – though as this is a requirement for all governing boards and a key element of effective governance, it is concerning that almost one in ten boards either did not or did not know if this is the case.

Governing boards obtain the services of clerks through different means. Maintained schools and federations were most likely to employ a clerk through the local authority (42% and 40% did so respectively). The next most popular scenarios were that the clerk was self-employed (20% and 21% respectively) or had another role in the school (both

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2 Percentages do not add up to 100% as respondents were able to select multiple uses.

19%). NGA is aware that it can make it difficult for clerks to give independent, objective advice where they are also employed in the school in another role. It is therefore NGA's view that where this is the case, it is essential for there to be a separate contract, clear job description and time allocation for the role of clerk.

For multi-academy trust trustees and those on academy committees, the most likely scenario was that the clerk was employed by the trust (36% and 33% respectively), followed by being employed in one of the schools (21% and 22%). Significant proportions used freelance clerks (17% and 13%) or made use of local authority clerking services (13% and 16%).

Single academy trusts were most likely to have a clerk who had another role in the school (35%). The next most frequent scenarios for this type of school was that the clerk was freelance (26%) or employed through the local authority (15%). The fact that many academies continue to use local authority clerking services indicates that there is less of a binary divide between the academies and maintained sectors than some would suggest.

Recommendations for governing boards

- Single academy trusts that have large numbers of trustees and/or committees should review their governance structure to ensure that it is effective and proportionate to the needs of the organisation.

- Ensure that a code of conduct is adopted and embedded in the behaviour of the board.

- Ensure that there is a system in place for regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the governing board and recognising the contributions of individuals.

Funding and finance

As discussed in section 4, the topic of school funding was the most important issue to the governors and trustees who responded to this year's survey. This section analyses responses about the funding and finances of respondents' schools.

More governing boards could be making use of financial efficiency benchmarking tools

Half of all respondents either had not (9%) or did not know (41%) whether their school or group of schools had made use of the Department for Education's financial efficiency benchmarking tools. 23% of respondents said the tools had been used by the governing board while 27% said that school staff had made use of them.

That such a large proportion did not know suggests that there is more that NGA and the Department for Education could do to promote the tools to governors and trustees.

Only half of respondents' schools had a balanced budget

We asked governors and trustees about the current financial position of their school and only half said that they were currently balancing income and expenditure. Almost a third were drawing on reserves (with 38% of respondents from single academy trusts, 31% of respondents on local academy committees and 35% of respondents governing as trustees of multi-academy trusts drawing on reserves) while one in twenty were either using a licensed deficit from the local authority or a loan from the Education & Skills Funding Agency. Just over one in twenty had a positive balance and were building reserves.

Figure fifteen

What is the financial position of your school?

- Balancing income and expenditure — 51%
- In-year deficit i.e. drawing on reserves — 30%
- Using licensed deficit from local authority/loan from Education & Skills Funding Agency — 5%
- Building reserves — 6%
- Don't know — 4%
- Other — 4%
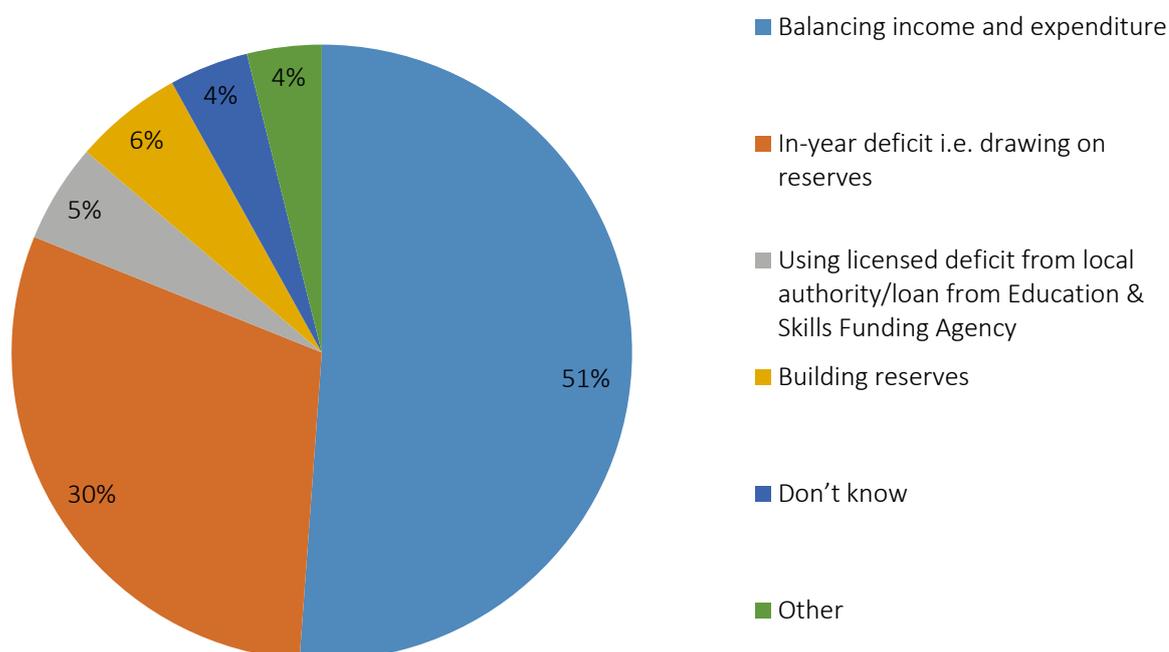
Of those who were drawing on reserves, three quarters said that their reserves would run out within two years' time: 14% expected their reserves to run out this year, 26% next year and 34% in two years' time.

Just half of respondents could say that they expected to be able to balance their budgets next year, while a quarter said they did not expect to be able to and the other quarter were unsure.

High needs funding is a big issue for schools

Just 15% of respondents said they receive sufficient high needs funding to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

There is significant pressure on early years funding

Respondents who governed nursery schools or schools with nursery classes were asked whether the early years funding they receive is sufficient to meet the needs of pupils. Only a fifth said that the funding is sufficient, while 63% disagreed (the remainder had no view).
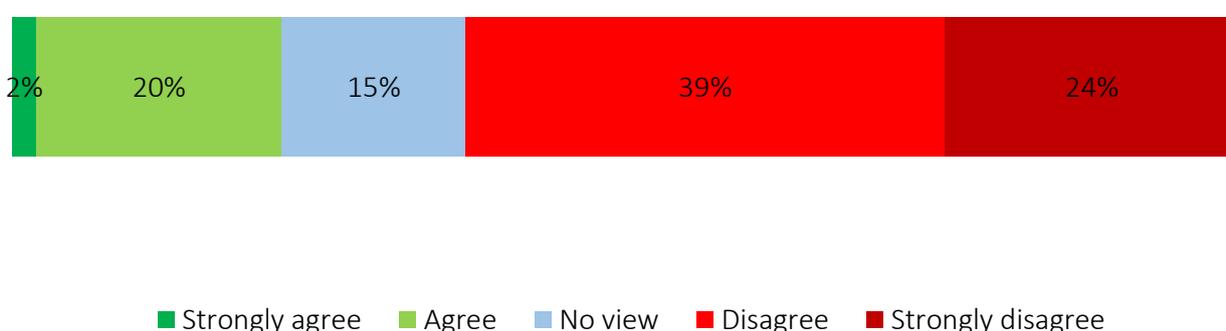
Figure sixteen

We receive sufficient high needs funding to meet the needs of our pupils with special educational needs

| 2% | 13% | 12% | 40% | 34% |
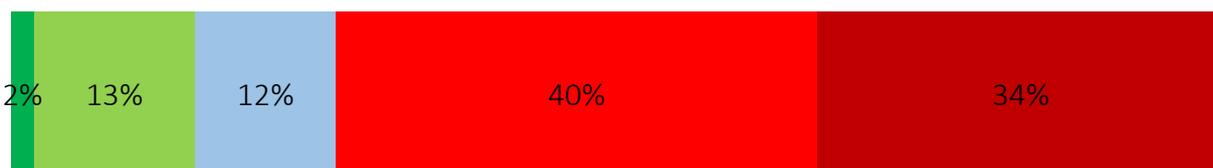
■ Strongly agree   ■ Agree   ■ No view/don't know   ■ Disagree   ■ Strongly disagree

Figure seventeen

We receive sufficient funding to meet the needs of pupils in early years

| 2% | 20% | 15% | 39% | 24% |

■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No view ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

Schools have already made significant cuts due to financial constraints, including to staff

Respondents were asked about the impact of financial constraints on their school and the results show that significant cuts have already been made to many schools' budgets. Reducing the number of support staff was the most common way respondents' schools had reacted, with 47% having already done so and 28% anticipating doing so in the next two years. 30% of respondents' schools had also reduced the number of teaching staff with a further 20% expecting to do so in the next two years.
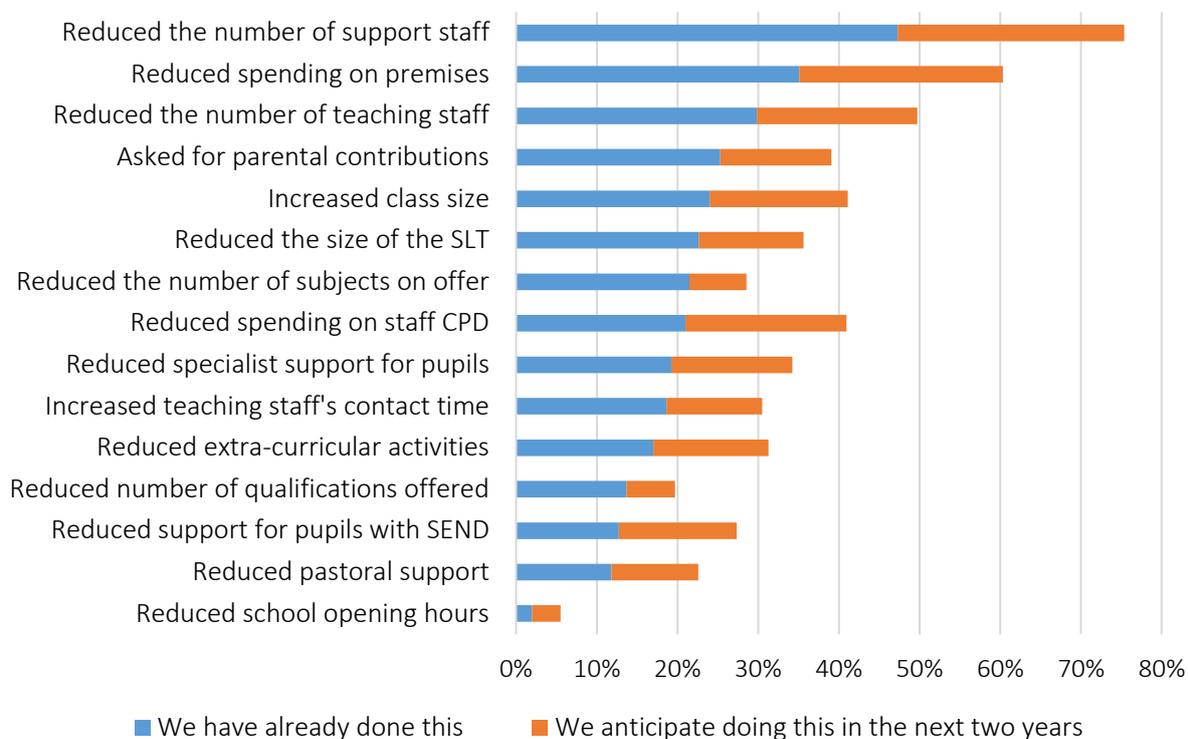
Reducing spending on buildings and maintenance (premises) was the next most common response, with 35% having done so and 25% anticipating doing so in the next two years. This is likely to have a long term impact as lack of investment in buildings now may mean more costly work is needed in the future.

The financial constraints are also likely to be impacting negatively on teacher workload, with 24% of respondents saying that class sizes have been increased and 19% saying that teaching staff's contact time has been increased.

Significant numbers of pupils will be affected not only by reducing numbers of staff and bigger classes but by reductions in the number of subjects, qualifications and extra-curricular activities on offer. The fact that many schools are reducing access to specialist support, such as sessions with educational psychologists, support for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and pastoral support is especially concerning as these actions are likely to impact disproportionately on the most vulnerable pupils.
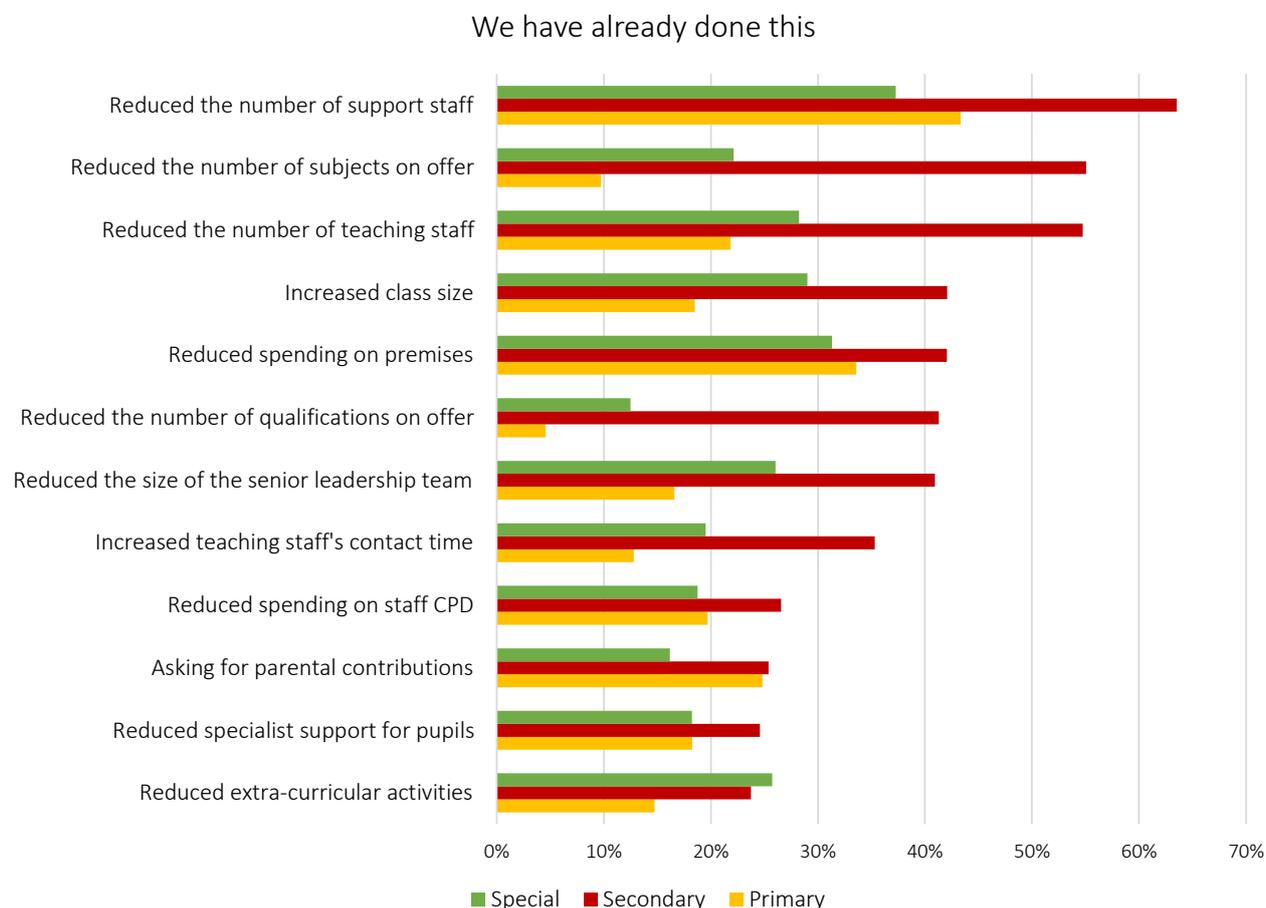
How have financial constraints affected your school(s)?

Reduced the number of support staff
Reduced spending on premises
Reduced the number of teaching staff
Asked for parental contributions
Increased class size
Reduced the size of the SLT
Reduced the number of subjects on offer
Reduced spending on staff CPD
Reduced specialist support for pupils
Increased teaching staff's contact time
Reduced extra-curricular activities
Reduced number of qualifications offered
Reduced support for pupils with SEND
Reduced pastoral support
Reduced school opening hours

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80%

■ We have already done this   ■ We anticipate doing this in the next two years

Secondary schools have felt the biggest impact from funding pressures so far

The figures from the overall responses mask a particularly bleak picture among secondary schools. A higher proportion of respondents governing secondary schools than primary or special said they had taken each one of the actions listed, with the exception of reducing the provision of extra-curricular activities which was most common among special schools.

The responses indicate that funding pressures are narrowing the curriculum for many secondary school pupils: 55% of those governing secondary schools said that the number of subjects on offer had been reduced and 41% had reduced the number of qualifications on offer. As well as having their opportunities restricted, many secondary school pupils are also being taught in bigger classes, with 42% of secondary school respondents saying class sizes had increased as a result of financial pressures.

Figure nineteen

We have already done this

Reduced the number of support staff	
Reduced the number of subjects on offer	
Reduced the number of teaching staff	
Increased class size	
Reduced spending on premises	
Reduced the number of qualifications on offer	
Reduced the size of the senior leadership team	
Increased teaching staff's contact time	
Reduced spending on staff CPD	
Asking for parental contributions	
Reduced specialist support for pupils	
Reduced extra-curricular activities	

■ Special ■ Secondary ■ Primary

However, it is possible that many more primary and special schools will soon begin to be more deeply affected by financial pressures, with 32% of respondents from primary schools and 22% from special schools saying that they anticipate reducing the number of support staff during the next two years. 27% of those governing primary schools and 21% of those governing special schools said that they expect to reduce spending on buildings and maintenance and 22% of primary school respondents and 18% of special school respondents expect to reduce the number of teaching staff employed.

Funding pressures are increasingly impacting on sixth form curriculums

The proportion of those governing sixth forms who said that the number of subjects on offer had been reduced has risen by ten percentage points from 57% in 2017 to 67% in

2018. The proportion of respondents who had reduced the number of teaching staff in their sixth forms had also risen from 28% in 2017 to 34% this year and the proportion who had reduced the number of qualifications on offer had risen from 26% to 36% over the same period.

32% said that sixth form class sizes had been increased, up from 18% in 2017. For the first time, respondents were asked whether they had reduced the extra-curricular opportunities on offer for sixth form pupils, which 19% had, and whether contact time for sixth form pupils had been reduced, which 20% said that it had.

The proportion whose schools use 11-16 funding to subsidise sixth form provision had fallen from 29% in 2017 to 22% this year, perhaps indicating that, as budgets get tighter, as a whole schools are less able to protect sixth forms from funding pressures.

All school types are feeling the impact of cuts to local authority services

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'cuts to local authority services, such as school improvement or children's services, have had an adverse effect on our school(s)'. 72% of respondents agreed with the statement, an increase of nine percentage points from the previous year's survey.

Interestingly, it was not only maintained schools who were feeling the impact, with 66% of single academy trust trustees, 59% of multi-academy trust trustees and 70% of those on academy committees agreeing with the statement. This highlights that the wider support services available for children are important to all schools, whatever their legal structure.

Just one in five respondents thought funding pressures would not negatively impact the quality of education

Given the findings outlined above, it will come as little surprise that just 20% of the respondents were confident that they could manage current funding pressures without any adverse impact on the quality of education provided.

Figure twenty

I am confident that funding pressures can be managed without any adverse impact on the quality of education provided

| 3% | 17% | 7% | 38% | 36% |
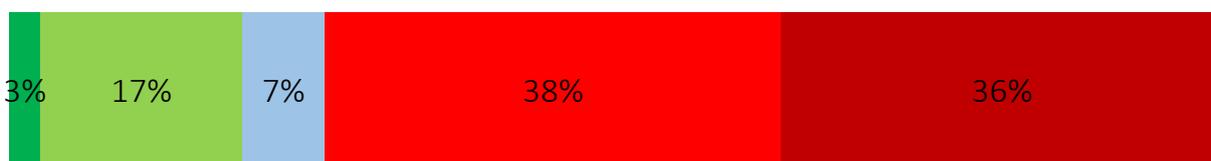
- ■ Strongly agree
- ■ Agree
- ■ No view
- ■ Disagree
- ■ Strongly disagree

Funding the Future

Funding the Future is NGA's campaign for increased investment in schools which is vital to ensuring that children and young people receive the education and opportunities they deserve. Working with governors and trustees up and down the country as well as unions and parent groups, we are calling for an increase in the overall schools budget in the next spending review, as well as a reversal of cuts to 16-18 funding, investment in early years and high needs budgets to be increased.

Find out more about the campaign and how you can get involved at www.nga.org.uk/fundingthefuture.

Recommendations for governing boards

- Write to your MP, invite them to visit the schools and meet with the governing board, and the Chancellor about the funding situation in your school and ask for the budget to be increased in next year's spending review.

- Support NGA's Funding the Future campaign by helping us demonstrate how budget constraints are damaging the quality of education provided to pupils across the country; to find out more, including how to get in touch, visit www.nga.org.uk/fundingthefuture.

Recommendations for government

- Increase the overall schools budget in the next spending review to ensure that all schools are able to offer pupils the standard of education they deserve.

- Address the shortfall in high needs funding which puts the education of pupils with special educational needs at risk.

- Reverse cuts to sixth forms and invest in early years.

- Consider the impact of cuts to local authority services (both school improvement and children's services) on schools and on pupils' readiness for learning.

Staffing

Recruiting staff is a challenge for many governing boards and their schools

Of those respondents who had experience recruiting staff in the current year, 38% reported difficulty attracting good candidates when recruiting a headteacher, 39% when recruiting to other senior staff posts and 47% when recruiting to teaching posts.
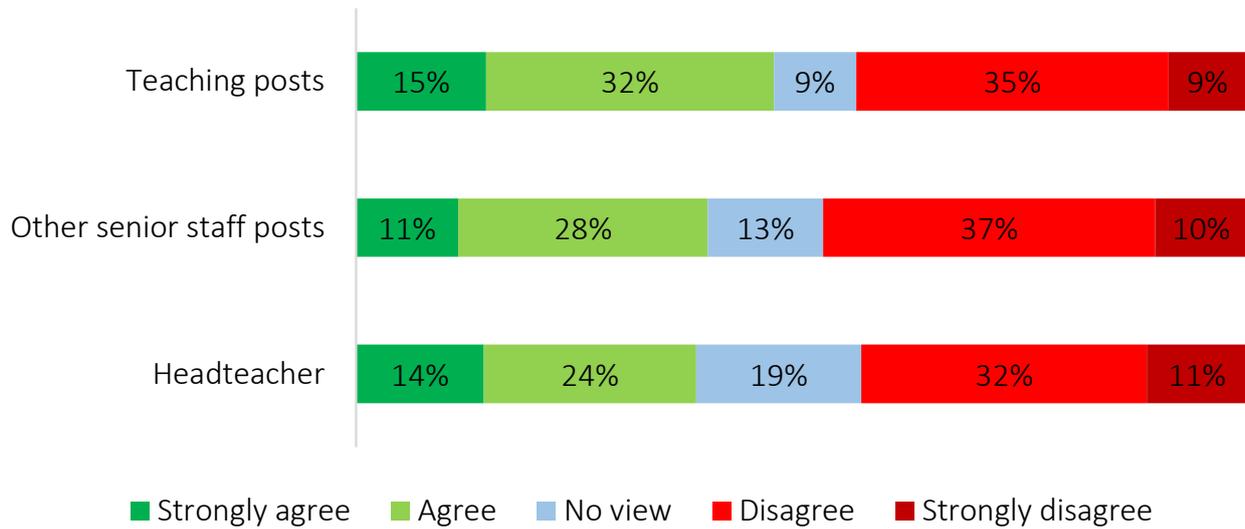
Staff recruitment is particularly challenging in regions surrounding London

For all three categories of staff, the regions in which the highest proportion of respondents reported difficulty attracting good candidates were the South East, Outer London[3] and the East of England. This suggests that competition for candidates is fiercest in the areas immediately surrounding the capital.

When it comes to headteacher recruitment, there was little difference between responses from Inner and Outer London.

Figure twenty one

We find it difficult to attract good candidates when recruiting for:

Teaching posts: Strongly agree 15% | Agree 32% | No view 9% | Disagree 35% | Strongly disagree 9%

Other senior staff posts: Strongly agree 11% | Agree 28% | No view 13% | Disagree 37% | Strongly disagree 10%

Headteacher: Strongly agree 14% | Agree 24% | No view 19% | Disagree 32% | Strongly disagree 11%

Legend: ■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ No view ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree

3 Inner London and Outer London have been defined in line with the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Document.

Figure twenty two

We have difficulty attracting good candidates when recruiting a headteacher

Figure twenty three

We have difficulty attracting good candidates when recruiting to other senior staff posts
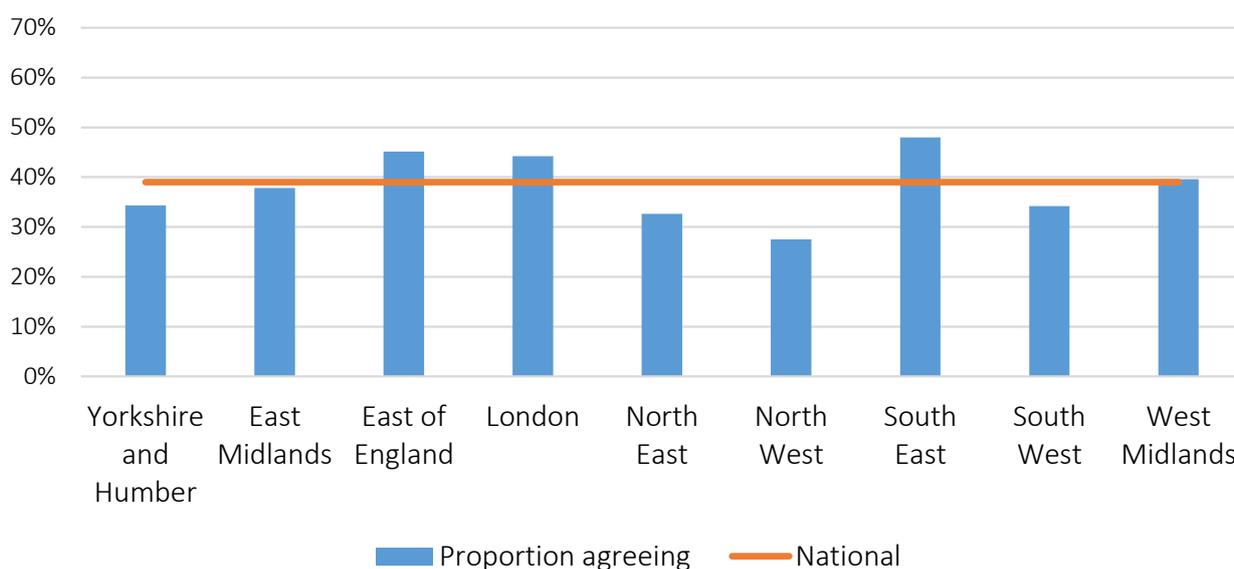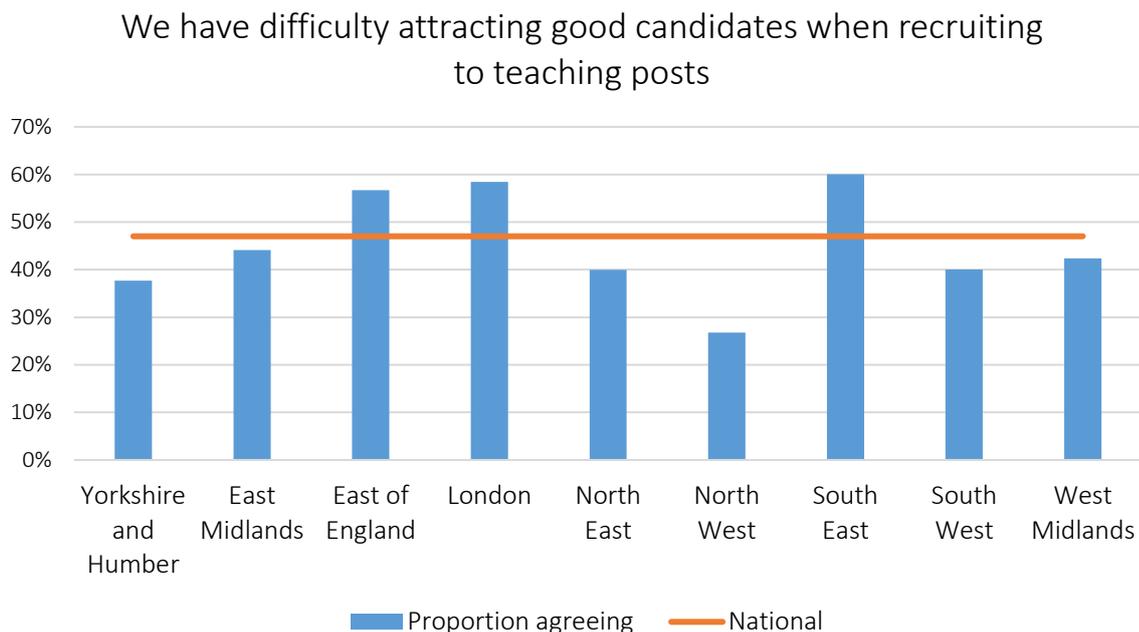
Figure twenty four

We have difficulty attracting good candidates when recruiting to teaching posts

Respondents in the north of England and the South West appear to have less difficulty recruiting staff than those in other parts of the country. It is not possible to determine the cause of this pattern from the survey responses but as London, the South East and the East of England are the government office regions with the highest house prices this may act as a disincentive for teachers to settle in these areas (HM Land Registry, 2018).

Research on teacher retention has found high rates of London teachers both leaving the profession and leaving to work in other regions coupled with increasing demand for teachers as a result of rising pupil numbers (Worth et al,

2017). This may explain some of the difficulty respondents in London were experiencing with recruiting. It is possible that the differences in pay for teachers in Inner and Outer London is driving the divide between the two parts of the capital as schools may be competing for some of the same pool of candidates.

Schools with lower Ofsted grades find it harder to recruit staff

The responses also suggest that attracting good candidates is more difficult for schools judged 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' by Ofsted. This was true for headteachers, other senior staff posts and for teaching posts.

Figure twenty five

We find it difficult to attract good candidates when recruiting for:

It is not possible to tell from the survey responses whether receiving an Ofsted judgement less than 'good' is a cause or consequence of recruitment difficulties but the finding does raise an important question for the sector about how the workforce can be motivated to work in more challenging settings.

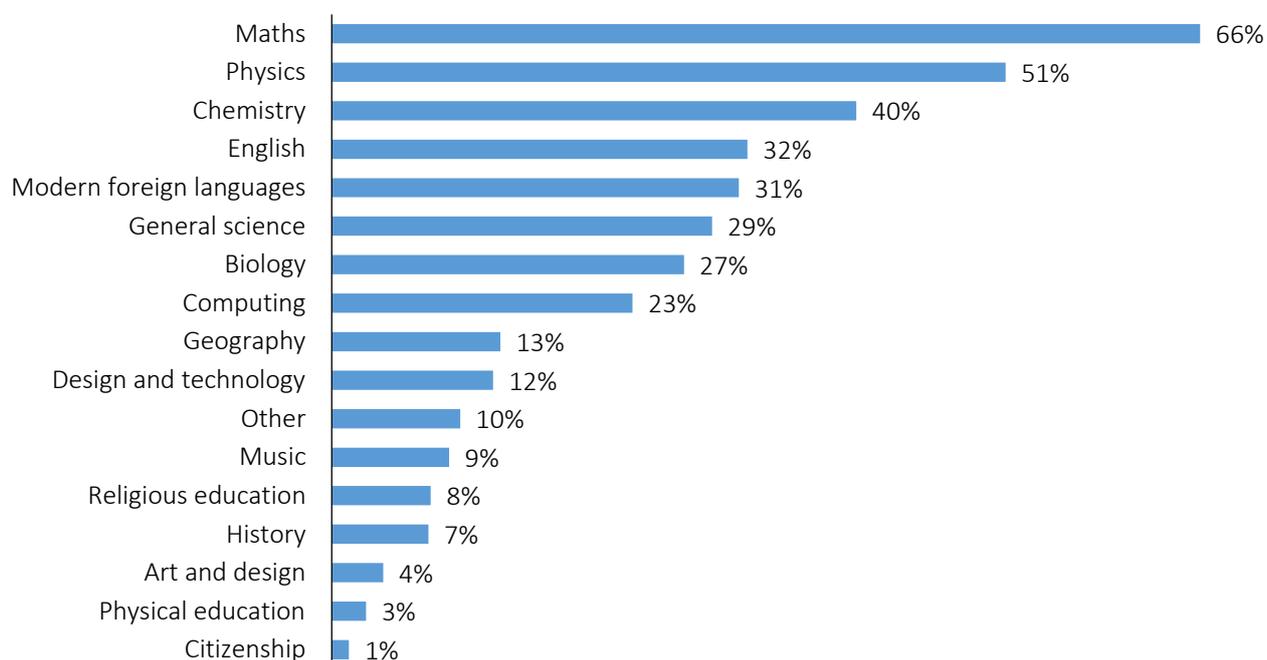## Secondary schools are struggling to recruit to most core subjects

We asked those governing secondary schools to indicate which subjects they have difficulty recruiting teaching staff for. Maths and physics were the most commonly selected options, with 66% of the 1,072 respondents that answered saying they have difficulty recruiting maths teachers and 51% having difficulty recruiting physics teachers. Chemistry was the next most difficult, selected by 40% of respondents.

Other sciences and English, which 32% of respondents said was difficult to recruit to, were among the next most frequently selected subjects.

Modern foreign languages was also a challenge to recruit to for 31% of those who responded; as the government's aim is for 75% of pupils to study a language GCSE as part of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) by 2022, this may indicate a challenge for some schools to meet this expectation. It appears that recruitment tends to be easier for the humanities elements of the EBacc: recruiting geography teachers was difficult for 13% of respondents while 7% had difficulty recruiting history teachers. The fact that fewer respondents were having difficulty recruiting teachers for arts subjects may mean that there are more candidates for these roles or it may mean that fewer posts are being recruited to.

Figure twenty six

Secondary only: do you have difficulties recruiting teaching staff in any particular subject(s)? Please select all that apply

Subject	%
Maths	66%
Physics	51%
Chemistry	40%
English	32%
Modern foreign languages	31%
General science	29%
Biology	27%
Computing	23%
Geography	13%
Design and technology	12%
Other	10%
Music	9%
Religious education	8%
History	7%
Art and design	4%
Physical education	3%
Citizenship	1%

Only a minority of governing boards have introduced incentives to retain teachers

Given that many experience difficulty recruiting, it might be expected that many schools would have in place incentives to retain high quality staff. Just 13% of respondents said that this was the case, however, with a further 25% unsure.

The incentives that had been introduced included financial ("additional salary", "bonus scheme for teachers at top of scale", "golden hello") and facilitating flexible working for those who wanted it. Many respondents described providing opportunities for progression or continuing professional development as key parts of their retention strategies.

Some respondents cited incentives which were focused on improving staff wellbeing, for example one school had "introduced a staff well-being group which offers suggestions to improve staff welfare and happiness,

the realistic suggestions are adopted" and another referenced a "personal support/caring culture".

A few respondents gave preference to the children of staff in their admission codes and some offered staff a day or more's leave during term time.

As well as not introducing incentives for retention, less than a quarter (24%) of respondents reported that their governing boards were receiving summary reports of exit interviews, meaning most were missing out on crucial insight into the reasons staff were leaving the school.

Governing boards recognise teacher workload as a problem and many are taking steps to reduce it

The majority (67%) of governing boards recognise that teacher workload is a problem in their schools and 43% had taken steps to reduce it.

Figure twenty seven

Do you think teacher workload is a problem at your school(s)?

Don't know
11%

Yes and steps have been taken to reduce it
43%

No
22%

Yes but no steps have yet been taken to reduce it
24%
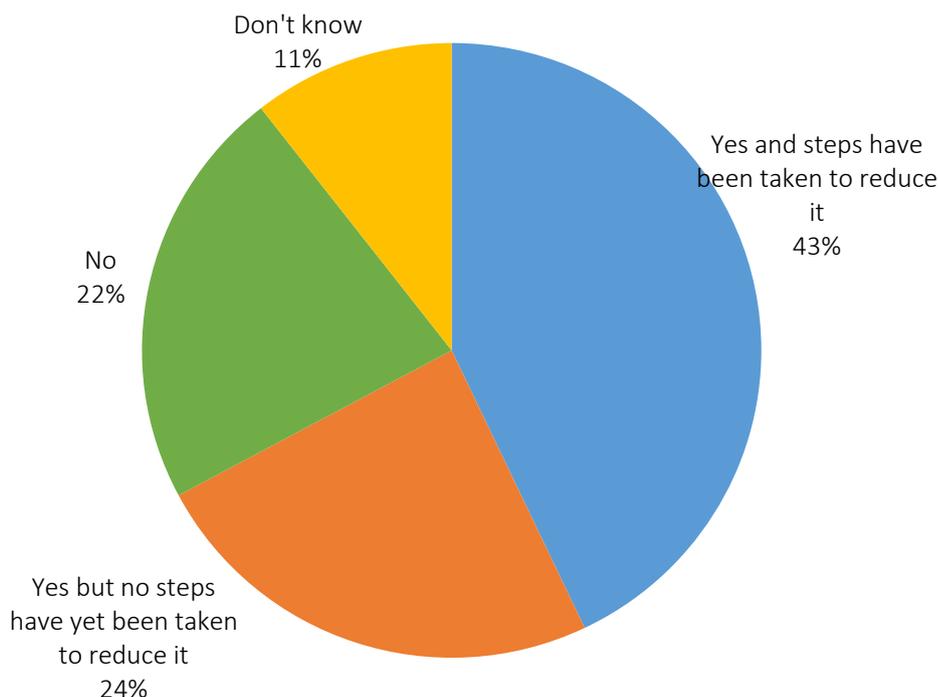
The steps that respondents' schools had taken included changes to marking and feedback policies, restrictions on the times of day emails are sent to staff, redistributing responsibilities and increasing the support available to teachers from administrative staff and teaching assistants. Some respondents spoke about giving teachers more non-contact time or a reduction in class sizes – many respondents told us that they were being forced to do the opposite as a result of funding pressures, underlining that squeezed budgets may be making it difficult for many schools to tackle teacher workload.

Many governing boards get important information about staffing but a considerable minority do not

Holding the lead executive to account for the performance management of staff is among the core functions of governing boards, so analysing information about staffing in the organisation is important. Responses suggest that the majority of governing boards consider this data, with 80% saying they receive data on staff turnover, 71% saying they receive summary reports of performance reviews and how they link to pay awards and 70% saying that they received data on staff absence.

The objectives of the headteacher or other lead executive were shared with 81% of respondents' governing boards. The headteacher appraisal panel will of course be involved in the setting of objectives but NGA's view is that, aside from some confidential personal objectives, there is no good reason why the panel should not share the headteachers' objectives – which should, after all, be linked to the strategic priorities of the organisation – with the rest of the governing board.

NGA's recent research report, Taking Headteacher Appraisal Seriously, explores the current headteacher performance appraisal landscape; find out more at www.nga.org.uk/appraisal.

One in ten are not receiving a written report from the lead executive in advance of governing board meetings

Holding the lead executive (whether headteacher, chief executive or executive headteacher) to account is one of the core functions of the governing board and therefore receiving a report on progress towards the strategic objectives is a crucial tool for good governance. While the majority are receiving such a report in advance of full governing board meetings (83%), 8% of respondents said that the lead executive's report was tabled at meetings, not allowing those governing sufficient time to absorb the information and identify lines of inquiry, and 2% said that they did not receive a report. Some of the 5% who selected 'other' specified that, while they had more frequent meetings, the lead executive reported once a term by agreement. Others said that reports were not received consistently. Some said that a report was received in advance but not seven days in advance, as is required for papers for maintained school governing body meetings and good practice in academies.

Recommendations for governing boards

- Consider incentives to retain staff and measures to address unnecessary teacher workload.

- Ensure that the information reported to the board about staffing allows for the identification of potential issues.

- Ensure that the lead executive reports to the governing board in the agreed format and timescale and that these reports are received at least seven days in advance of meetings.

Recommendations for government

- Continue to look at mechanisms to address teacher recruitment shortages particularly for areas surrounding London.

Governing groups of schools

Just over a third of standalone schools are currently considering or in the process of forming or joining a group

We asked respondents whose schools were not currently part of a formal group whether this was something they were considering or in the process of: overall, 36% said that they were, slightly lower than the 43% who said the same in 2017.

13% were in the process of forming or joining a multi-academy trust while 3% were in the process of forming or joining a federation. A further 14% were considering becoming part of a multi-academy trust (MAT) while 6% were considering the possibility of federation. This compares to 22% and 5% respectively in the 2017 survey.

Among those that were not currently considering forming or joining a group, 21% planned to consider these questions in the future, 30% had already done so and decided against it and 12% simply had not discussed the issue. 25% of those governing federations said that their governing body is considering forming or joining a multi-academy trust.

The fact that a majority of those not currently governing in a multi-academy trust are not currently considering or pursuing this option is probably influenced by the policy of the Department of Education, which has reduced its emphasis on academisation since dropping its proposals for all schools to become academies in Spring 2016. It is encouraging to see that the majority of governing boards are considering the options available and making the choices they believe best serve the interests of children in their community. It also reflects a lack of clear direction from central government and it is possible that different messages have been heard by those governing in the various regional schools commissioner areas.

The majority of multi-academy trusts delegate significant responsibilities to their academy committees

80% of trustees of multi-academy trusts said that they have academy committees (sometimes known as 'local governing bodies') for every school in their trust. 3% had them for some schools and 5% had them for clusters of schools.

Responses of both multi-academy trust trustees and academy committee members suggest that the majority of academy committees have significant delegated responsibilities. 91% said they were responsible for monitoring pupil progress and attainment within their academies, 71% for monitoring key strategic priorities, 66% for engagement with stakeholders, 63% for determining school level policies, 60% for management of the school's budget, and 57% for appraisal of the headteacher or head of school.

Having a clear, well understood scheme of delegation is vital to ensuring multiple layers of governance operate effectively and building a culture of trust and transparency: 91% of the trustees of multi-academy trusts who responded told us that they have a scheme of delegation in place that all trustees and academy committees are aware of. Despite this, the fact that as many as 7% of respondents did not know if this were the case suggests that the centrality of this document is not universally appreciated.

NGA has produced model schemes of delegation to help trustees in both single academy trusts and multi-academy trusts decide the best governance structure for their organisation. The models also suggest what to delegate and to whom, with a number of given scenarios. These pioneering guides build on the experience NGA has of working with academy trusts of various sizes, complexity and maturity. Find out more at www.nga.org.uk/guidance/schemes.

Most of those on academy committees think the multi-academy trust adds value to their school

65% of 819 respondents who were on the academy committees of schools within a multi-academy trust agreed that the trust adds value to the work of the academy. 13% disagreed while 22% had no view.

Too many multi-academy trusts do not have separation between their layers of governance

72% of the multi-academy trust trustees who responded told us that there are trustees on their board who also sit on academy committees for individual schools within the multi-academy trust. 73% said there are trustees on their board who are also members of the trust.

The Academies Financial Handbook sets out the Department for Education's view that "there should be a significant degree of separation between the individuals

who are members and those who are trustees… The Department's strong preference is for a majority of members to be independent of the board of trustees". NGA would go further and recommend that any one individual only has one role in the governance of an organisation.

The majority of multi-academy trusts plan to expand

Two thirds of trustees of multi-academy trusts told us that they plan to increase the number of academies in the trust, while a further 23% would consider it if a suitable school were interested in joining. Just 7% of respondents were certain that they had reached the optimal size to deliver on their vision.

The Department for Education are clear that there is no 'best' size for a multi-academy trust and that trust boards should make their own decisions about growth based on capacity to provide for the pupils in their schools. It is interesting, therefore, to see that growth is part of the strategy of so many multi-academy trusts through this may be driven by a range of factors, including finances, the desire to improve education for more children, or the creation of opportunities for staff.

Figure twenty eight

Do you plan to increase the number of academies in the MAT?

Don't know
3%

If suitable school interested
23%

No
7%

Yes
67%
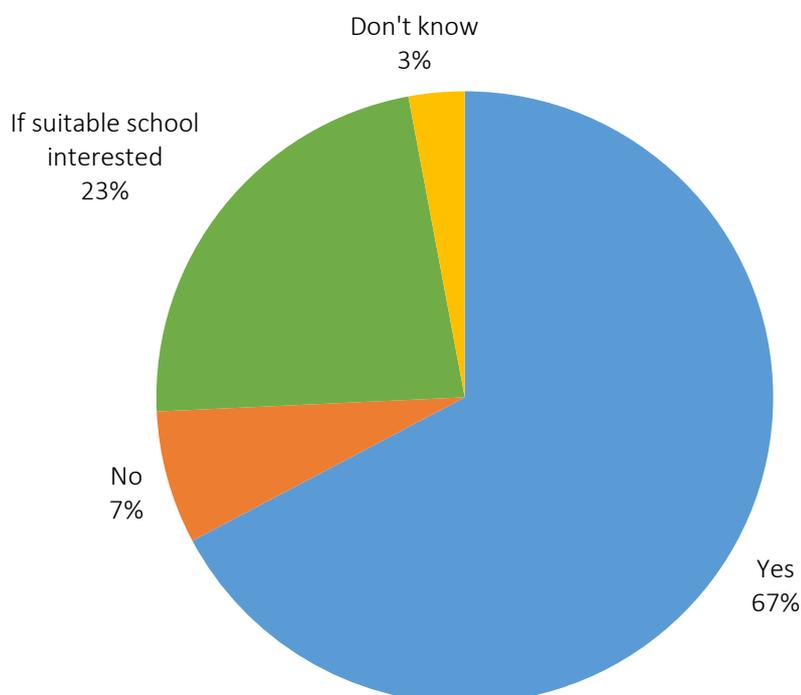
NGA support for groups of schools

NGA provides a range of information, guidance and publications for those governing groups of schools:
- Federation First provides resources to raise awareness of federation as an important option for school improvement and promote good practice in federation governance; find out more at **www.nga.org.uk/ FederationFirst**
- Welcome to a Multi Academy Trust is a high-quality practice guide on MAT governance structure and practice for new trustees and senior leaders; find out more at **www.nga.org.uk/publications/WTMAT**
- Our Community MATs network brings together trustees and clerks to share experiences and expand their knowledge; find out more at **www.nga.org.uk/CommunityMATs**
- **'In their own words: lessons learned by multi-academy trusts in their journey since creation'** provides rich and detailed case studies of individual trusts' experiences; visit **www.nga.org.uk/MATlessonslearned**
- The NGA guidance centre has a wealth of information on MAT governance at **www.nga.org.uk/guidance/ academies** and on federation governance at **www.nga.org.uk/guidance/federations**

Recommendations for governing boards

- Multi-academy trust boards of trustees should consider reviewing their governance structures to ensure separation between the layers of governance.

Recommendations for government

- Recognise that many governing boards have chosen not to join multi-academy trusts and ensure that policies are designed to support all school types on an equal basis.

Pupils and other stakeholders

Over a third of respondents' schools had altered the curriculum in response to performance measures

Over a third of respondents (37%) said that their school (or group of schools) had altered the curriculum offered to pupils in response to performance measures, while 45% said that they had not and 18% did not know whether this was the case.

Some respondents said that the alterations had led to a narrower curriculum; for example, one person said that their school had "heavier emphasis on English and Maths so less on other subjects" and another that their school now offered "fewer opportunities for the broad and balanced, play based curriculum we favour in light of recent changes to the curriculum and testing regimes across primary phases". Others cited increased emphasis on delivering the subjects included in the English Baccalaureate or responding to recommendations made by Ofsted.

Some changes were presented as being more positive, such as "revision in order to offer more challenge to more able pupils" and "pupil keep up catch up in place for two or three years now – increasing support for children".

Figure twenty nine

Has your school altered its curriculum in response to performance measures?

Don't know
18%

Yes
37%

No
45%
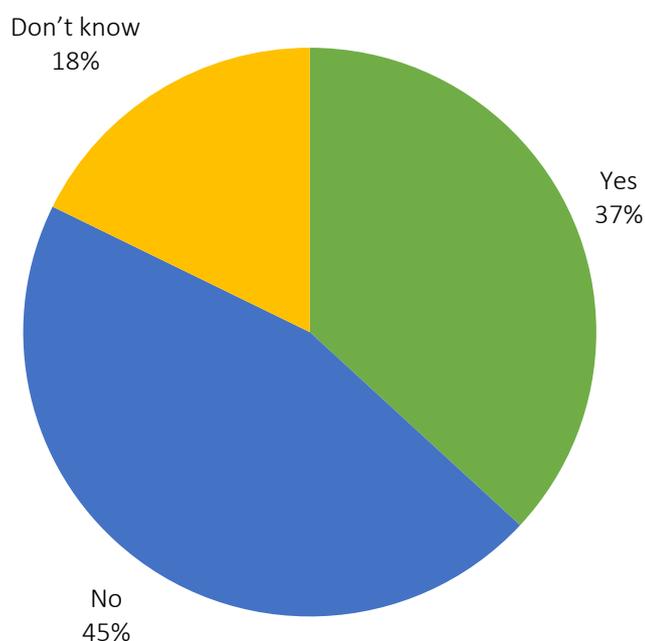
Those governing secondary schools were slightly more likely than those governing primary schools to say that the curriculum had changed in response to performance measures: 39% compared to 36%.

31% of those governing 'outstanding' schools said the same, compared to 38% of those governing 'good' schools, 44% of those governing 'requires improvement' schools and 40% of those governing 'inadequate' schools.

Opinion is split on how well statutory assessments reflect pupils' learning

Asked whether, in their opinion, key stage 2 SATs results give an accurate picture of pupils' abilities in English and mathematics, 41% of those governing schools with key stage 2 said that they did while 45% said that they did not (the remainder had no view).

Of those governing schools with key stage 4, 47% agreed that Progress 8 gives a fair measure of the progress pupils make while 32% disagreed (again, the remainder had no view).

### Almost half of primary schools offer no careers advice

47% of those governing primary, infant or junior schools said that no careers advice was offered to pupils, while a further 18% did not know. While formal advice on career options may be more suitable for older children, talking about future options with primary school age pupils can be powerful: for example, a 2016 study found that the earlier young people understand about the opportunities available through higher education, the more likely they are to apply to university (UCAS, 2016). It is therefore important that those governing primary schools consider how pupils are exposed to information about the different options that will be available to them when they leave school.

One way of doing this is through talks from external speakers, which 27% of those governing primary (including infant and junior) schools said are offered to pupils in their schools. 76% of those governing secondary schools said the same, making this the most popular form of careers advice for both age groups.

The majority of respondents from secondary schools also offered face-to-face careers advice (73%), work experience (68%) and careers fairs (64%).

Figure thirty

What form(s) of careers advice are offered to pupils?

Secondary / Primary (including infant and junior)
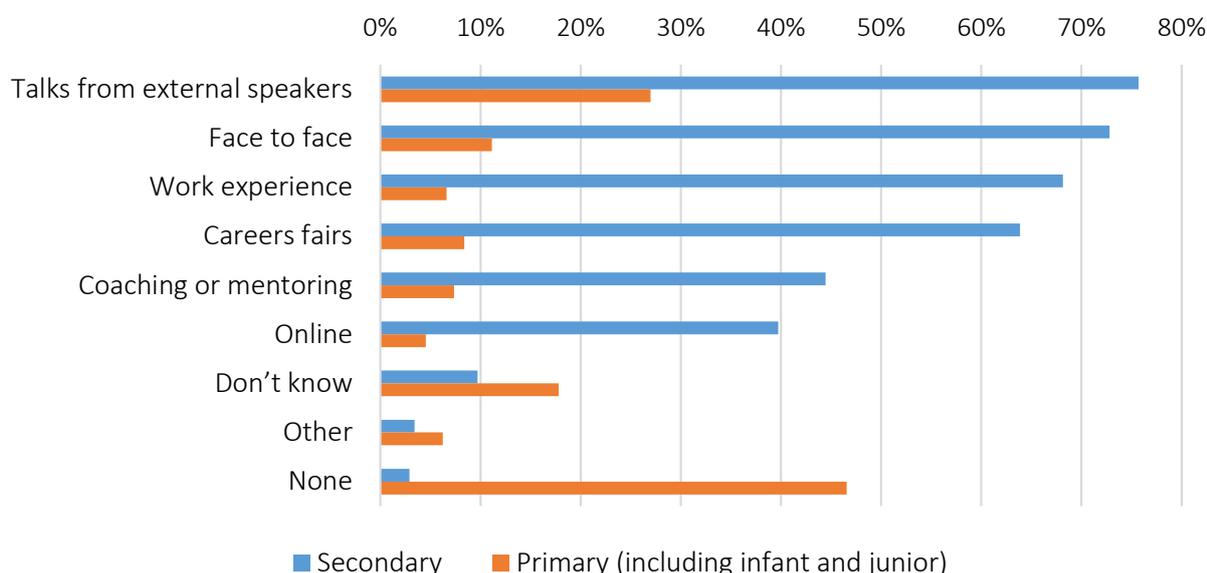
Respondents whose schools or groups of schools included sixth forms were asked whether other schools or further education institutions were allowed to visit and talk to pupils about what qualifications and courses they offer. 67% of respondents said that they were while 24% did not know whether this was the case.

### Almost half of schools are providing additional services for families in need

The survey asked whether respondents' schools were offering services for families experiencing financial hardship. 52% of respondents said that their school did not offer any of the examples given. By far the most common service

offered was financial support with purchasing uniform which was something that 38% of respondents said that their school offers.

The other examples were offered by only a small proportion of respondents' schools, though as these examples were further removed from the day-to-day business of schools the significance of as many as 7% of schools offering food banks for pupils' families should not be underestimated. 5% were offering help with washing pupils' school uniforms, 4% were offering meals outside of term time and 2% were offering emergency loans.

Figure thirty one

Does your school provide any of the following services for families?
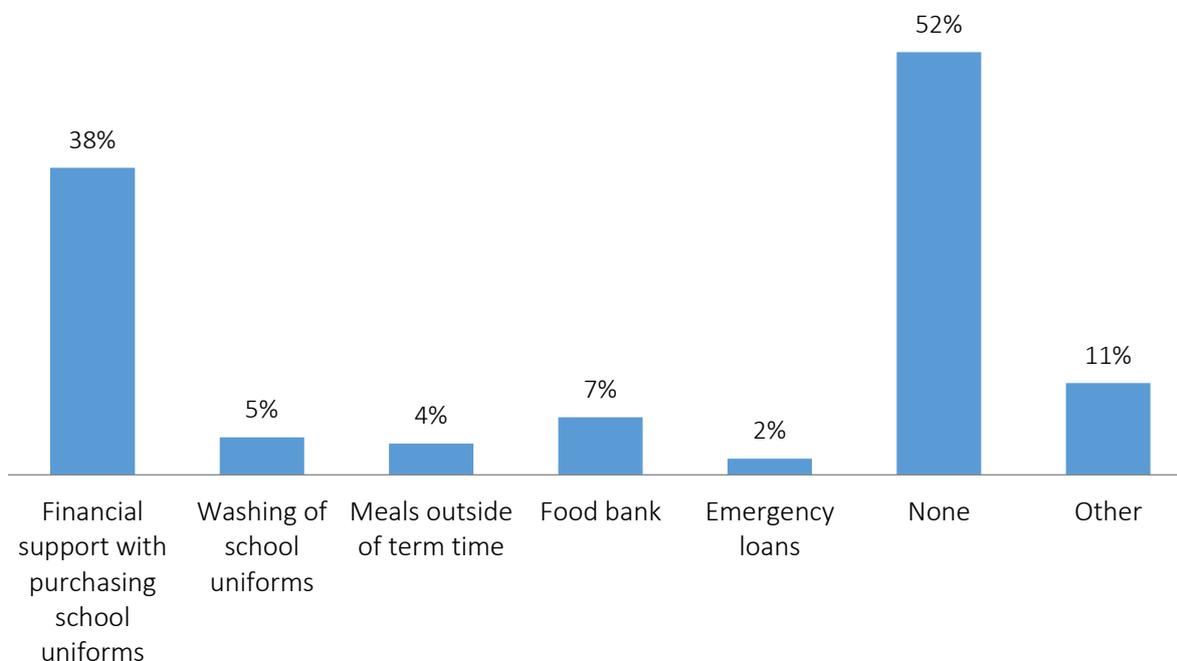
Among the 11% who identified other forms of support, access to breakfast or after school clubs and subsidised or free places on school trips were commonly mentioned. A few respondents said that their school provides assistance from a family support worker and some helped with transport costs to and from school where necessary.

This survey did not cover governing boards' role in spending, monitoring or evaluating the pupil premium as this topic was covered in detail in a recent NGA research report www.nga.org.uk/spotlight-on-disadvantage. The research is part of a wider campaign seeking to identify ways effective governance can improve disadvantaged pupils' experiences of school and educational outcomes.

Surveys are the most commonly employed methods of engaging with stakeholders

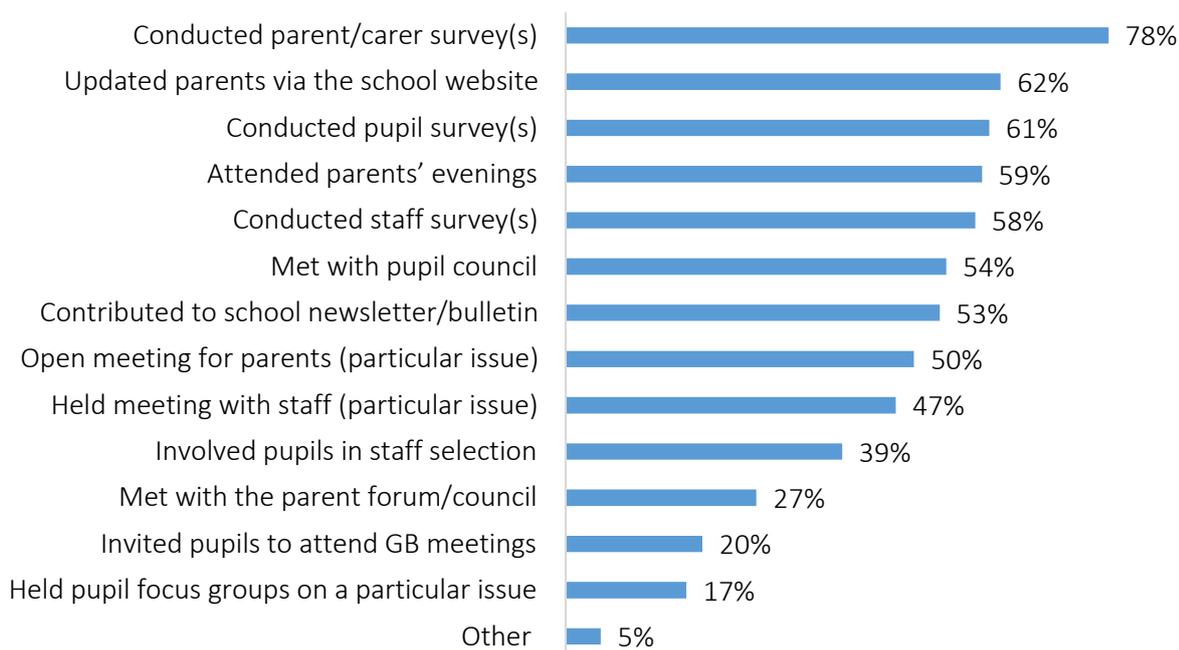Governing boards are already employing a range of strategies to engage with stakeholders.

The most common strategies used to engage with parents and carers included surveys, which 78% of respondents had used in the past year, updates on the school website which was used by 62%, and governors and trustees attending parents' evenings which was done by 59% of respondents' governing boards.

61% of respondents said that governing boards had sought out pupil voice through surveys and 54% had met with the pupil council in the past year.

Surveys were also the most popular method for engaging with staff, with 58% having carried out staff surveys in the previous year. Beyond this, 47% had held meetings with staff on a particular issue while 50% had done the same with parents.

Figure thirty two

What strategies has the governing board employed to engage with stakeholders in the past year?

Strategy	Percentage
Conducted parent/carer survey(s)	78%
Updated parents via the school website	62%
Conducted pupil survey(s)	61%
Attended parents' evenings	59%
Conducted staff survey(s)	58%
Met with pupil council	54%
Contributed to school newsletter/bulletin	53%
Open meeting for parents (particular issue)	50%
Held meeting with staff (particular issue)	47%
Involved pupils in staff selection	39%
Met with the parent forum/council	27%
Invited pupils to attend GB meetings	20%
Held pupil focus groups on a particular issue	17%
Other	5%

This survey cannot, of course, tell us about how meaningful or impactful these engagement exercises were. It does, however, suggest that many governing boards are making concerted efforts to seek the views of parents, pupils and staff and that there are examples that others wishing to develop in this area could follow.

NGA's proposal for ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders to be a fourth core function of governing boards had the support of a small majority of respondents

NGA has proposed that ensuring effective engagement with stakeholders should be made a fourth core function of governing boards. This is due to concerns that the existing three functions – setting the ethos, vision and strategy;

holding the headteacher to account for the performance of pupils and the performance management of staff; and ensuring financial probity – do not encapsulate the importance of making sure that the voices of stakeholders, including pupils, parents, staff and the wider community, are heard and taken into account in the governance of schools. There may be a particular risk as multi-academy trusts grow that trust boards become more distant from local stakeholders.

We asked governors and trustees whether they support this call and 58% said they did, 17% indicated that they would oppose the move and 25% were unsure.

Figure thirty three

Would you support the introduction of ensuring engagement with stakeholders as a fourth core function for school governing boards?

Don't know 25%

No 17%

Yes 58%
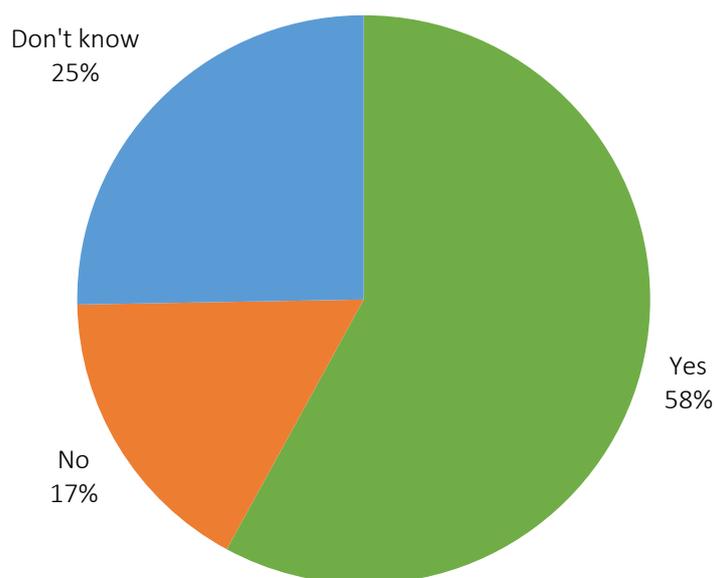
Among the reasons given for opposing adopting this additional core function were concerns about governing board workload and its impact on volunteer recruitment:

" While engagement is important, the vital strategic tasks allocated to governors along with the volume of policies that change during the year already make recruiting governors difficult – adding to this would only exacerbate this. "

" Our burden is heavy, trust us to engage where we need to but don't put artificial expectations on us. "

Others felt that it already happens and therefore an additional core function would be unnecessary:

" Do not believe it to be necessary. Governors know it is important and work with SLT to ensure engagement is satisfactory and valuable. "

Some felt that it is already part of the first core function of setting ethos, vision and strategic direction:

" The Governing Body needs to take stakeholder expectations into account in order to set the strategic direction for the school. "

A few respondents highlighted that engaging with some stakeholders can be challenging:

" We have made efforts, parents are not bothered unless there is an issue directly affecting their child. "

Some respondents said that they feel engaging with stakeholders is the role of the senior leadership team, although what NGA is proposing is adding "ensuring engagement" to the governing board's core functions which should not be taken to mean that all engagement activity is carried out by governors and trustees themselves:

" The senior leadership team should engage with stakeholders. In addition a lot is asked of governors so to add more to the work load is not appropriate. "

Some respondents who supported the move agreed that it was especially important for multi-academy trust (MAT) governance:

" It is essential to emphasise the importance of this as MAT boards are unavoidably more remote from each schools community. "

Others also supported the principle behind the proposal:

" Stakeholders are that by virtue of their name so should be part of the core functions. Have often thought it should be there. "

" Essential to promote transparency. "

" Having the community and particularly parents behind the school can transform outcomes for students. "

Some said that it would increase the governing board's emphasis on stakeholder engagement:

" I know we don't do enough and this would focus our minds on doing more. "

And some saw additional benefits for increasing understanding of the work of the school and particularly the role governing board:

" It's important to involve the wider community. Not only will this improve school/stakeholder communication and awareness but it will improve understanding of education and the needs of pupils and may also help to increase awareness of the role of governors and therefore help recruit more people to this role. "

NGA will take on board this feedback as we seek to develop our proposal further. Further information on ways to engage with stakeholders is available in the NGA Guidance Centre: www.nga.org.uk/guidance/pupilsparents.

Recommendations for governing boards

- Ensure that pressure to succeed against performance measures does not lead to a narrowed curriculum in school.

- Primary school governing boards in particular should consider how pupils' awareness of future career options and aspirations are developed.

- Ensure effective and meaningful engagement with stakeholders when developing strategy and making decisions affecting pupils, staff and parents.

Recommendations for government

- Ensure that performance measures support a broad and balanced curriculum providing all children with rounded opportunities to learn and develop.

- Focus on preventing child poverty to reduce the need for schools to offer services for families such as food banks.

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*prices from April 2018 to April 2019

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