

Chair of Governors Update

16th April 2026

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had a lovely half-term break, and a happy Easter and Passover to everyone who celebrated.

The main theme of the Governors Forum on 24th March centered on SEND & Inclusion, the first priority of [Hackney Education's 3-Year Strategic Plan](#). The session provided Governors with a comprehensive overview of their key roles and responsibilities regarding SEND pupils, alongside an exploration of Hackney's wider [SEND & Inclusion Strategy](#). These discussions are particularly timely given the DfE's significant SEND reforms, as detailed in the [White Paper: Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#).

During the forum, Governors were also briefed on Meaningful Parental Engagement, where we emphasised the shift of parental engagement from a "nice to have" to a core strategic priority, underscored by rising national complaint volumes and the complex socio-economic pressures currently facing families.

In planning ahead, we are delighted to confirm our summer conference:

Governors and School Leaders Joint Conference: Strength and Sustainability of our Education System

Wednesday 24 June 2026; 4pm to 7 pm Hackney Town Hall Atrium

This conference brings together Governors and leaders from across Hackney to prepare for the launch of the **Local Partnership Model** in September 2026.

Invitations with summary details have already been shared with Governors, Headteachers and council wide officers. This conference will be open to all Schools and we will share the full agenda and details of our Keynote speakers in the coming weeks. For now, **please remember to reserve the date.**

We trust that reviewing the accompanying [slide deck](#) and the notes below will provide further support and inspiration for your vital role as governors. This role is paramount in assisting your leaders and all staff to ensure our children remain safe, happy, and prepared for learning!

Sincerely,

Maggie Kalnins, Leader of Governance Services

MATTERS FOR BOARD / CHAIR ACTION

Madalina Brockmann, Governance Services Manager

FOR CHAIR ACTION: SAVE THE DATE- Hackney Joint Governors and School Leaders Conference: Strength & Sustainability - Wednesday 24 June 2026, 16:30-18:30.

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY TERM: STRATEGIC MEETING PLANNING - Chair / Headteacher / Clerk should collaborate, using expert tips for productive, strategy-focused time. We have significantly redesigned our termly planning resource. The new, comprehensive "**Framework with Guidance for School Governing Boards planning work for the Summer Term 2026**" boosts meeting effectiveness and strategic focus. It includes: Guidance Notes, **Best Practice Tips** (Part II), the **Planning Framework** (Part III), and a **Model FGB Agenda** (Part IV). This resource will be available on our website [here](#) next week.

FOR BOARD ACTION THIS TERM: BOARD CONSTITUTION / COMPLIANCE - Boards are advised to check that their **Local Authority (LA) governor vacancy** is appropriately filled to ensure full board capacity. If the current LA governor's term is approaching its end this summer or early autumn, please follow the formal appointment process detailed here as soon as possible: [Local Authority Governor Appointment Process](#). It is critical to note that the entire appointment process does involve layers of LA approval and can take several months, so early action is essential. Contact: governorservices@hackney.gov.uk.

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY TERM: COMMUNICATION WITH THE LA - Ensure the Local Authority has up-to date Chair of Governor details for essential communications and statutory processes. For any changes in Chairship, please can you instruct your governance professional / clerk to update us immediately. Contact: governorservices@hackney.gov.uk.

FOR BOARD ACTION THIS TERM: GOVERNOR TRAINING SUMMER 2026 - Ensure your governors have access and sign up to the updated free Hackney Strategic Leadership for Governors training programme for the Summer Term to boost your board's skills, knowledge, effectiveness, and compliance. Our offer can be found in our live [Governors' Training Programme 25/26](#) and at the bottom of this newsletter. Access our [Hackney Governor Training Padlet](#) to book and for live offers, recorded webinars, and Hackney toolkits. Contact: governorservices@hackney.gov.uk.

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY YEAR - STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMPLAINTS - [The NEW Hackney School/Academy Concerns / Complaints Health Check \(For maintained single schools, Federations, Academies\) 2025/26](#). We recommend governing boards annually use [_](#) as a "health check" resource. This tool assesses legal and procedural compliance for managing stakeholder concerns and complaints, ensuring lessons learned inform strategic planning and school improvement. Annual review significantly reduces complex complaints, leading to early de-escalation, increased staff/governor confidence in robust feedback management, lower stress, and improved outcomes. Contact governorservices@hackney.gov.uk for support.

FOR BOARD ACTION EVERY YEAR: BOARD EFFECTIVENESS - Annual Governing Board (Self) Review

An Annual Governing Board Self-Review is essential for continuous improvement and strategic leadership. It should assess twelve critical areas: Strategic Leadership and Vision, Accountability and Challenge, Compliance and Statutory Duties (including safeguarding), Financial Oversight, Board Composition and Skills, Meeting Effectiveness, Training and Development (including Ofsted preparation), Board Culture and Relationships, Stakeholder Engagement, Safeguarding Oversight, Risk Management and Digital Governance (including cyber/AI), and overall Impact and Outcomes (pupil progress, financial sustainability). Boards can use a Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Facilitated Discussion, External Review, or a Combination Approach.. Contact: governorservices@hackney.gov.uk.

We also remind you of our previous [updates and tools](#), our [Governors' Training Programme 25/26](#) and our [Governance Services offer](#), all designed to assist the crucial work you do.

EDUCATION DIRECTOR'S UPDATE
Director, Education & Inclusion - Jason Marantz

Hackney Education 3 Year Strategic Plan

A reminder that the Hackney Education 3 Year Strategic Plan can be found [here](#). The five priorities of the plan are as follows:

- Priority 1: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion
- Priority 2: Additional and Alternative Learning Provision
- Priority 3: Strength and sustainability
- Priority 4: Sustainable school improvement
- Priority 5: Equity for children and families

This document underpins everything we do at Hackney Education to support every school and student to thrive.

White Paper Reforms: 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'

The DfE has published its White Paper reforms, '[Every Child Achieving and Thriving](#)'. The White Paper outlines a decade-long plan for the UK education system, directing schools to lead a transition toward high-quality school trusts. The plan prioritises inclusive mainstream education for children with SEND and a broadened curriculum for all students.

This strategic framework will shape our work at Hackney and we are pleased to see that our different teams are working to implement the key ideas of the paper and to integrate the principles of inclusion and high-quality support for SEND students the paper emphasises.

Scrutiny Report on Behaviour Management and Inclusion

Hackney's Children and Young People's Scrutiny Commission is due to publish their report on Behaviour Management and Inclusion soon. The report aims to:

- Understand how different approaches to behaviour management impact on pupils and school inclusion.
- Identify what additional support schools and families require to enable them to support behaviour, learning and wellbeing needs of children.
- Identify and share best practice for behaviour management and inclusion across the local education system.

We will share the report with you once it has been published. Some more information about the scope of the report can be found [here](#).

National Year of Reading

2026 is the National Year of Reading! Led by the Department for Education, the 2026 National Year of Reading is a UK-wide initiative designed to reignite a passion for stories by connecting reading to people's everyday interests and hobbies.

Our primary and secondary reading team are working to support schools to promote the national year of reading and staff at Hackney Education have set up a sharing library to support each other to read more. Schools and governing boards are encouraged to promote the National Year of Reading and to get in touch if they would like any further support to take part.

[\(Slides 3-4\)](#)

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 1: Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) & Inclusion
Lead Officer: Yvonne Wade, Head of SEND

The Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) & Inclusion priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the October 2025 and March 2026 forums.

LOCAL UPDATES

SEND & Inclusion: Roles and Responsibilities for Governors

Hackney's SEND and Inclusion Strategy

Hackney's SEND and Inclusion Strategy can be found [here](#).

Key Priorities of the Strategy:

- Emotional wellbeing and family-centered support
- Inclusive environments (spaces, services, and attitudes) and belonging
- Transitions and future pathways
- Waiting times and equitable access to support
- Workforce development, training and resources

Areas for Improvement from Our Area SEND Inspection

- **Better use of data to evaluate the success of work across education, health and social care**, including developing key performance indicators so that leaders can be challenged effectively on their work
- **Improved work to develop a more inclusive approach within the local area to:** Reduce secondary age exclusions and suspension, improve the alternative provision offer and fair access protocol (FAP) and improve oversight of children educated other than at school (EOTAS)
- **Improve the timeliness and quality of EHC plans and improve the annual review process**
- **Improve provision and support for young people's Preparation for Adulthood**
- **Implement recovery plans to reduce CYP's waiting times** for a neurodevelopmental assessment, access to medication for those CYP who need it to manage their ADHD symptoms, continence assessments and post-assessment care

A Reminder of the Functions of the Governing Body

The core functions of the governing body are set out in [The School Governance \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) \(England\) Regulations 2013, regulation 6\(2\)](#) and include, but are not limited to ensuring:

- that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined
- that the headteacher performs their responsibilities for the educational performance of the school
- the sound, proper and effective use of the school's financial resources
- The governing body also has legislative responsibility and strategic oversight for the school's safeguarding arrangements.

Key Responsibilities of Governing Bodies for SEND

Governing bodies in England have a statutory duty to ensure schools use their "best endeavours" to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

What this means in practice:

- **Strategic Oversight:** Develop, implement, and monitor the school's SEND policy and report on its effectiveness.
- **Legal Compliance:** Ensure the school complies with the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and

- Families Act 2014, including publishing a SEND information report.
- **SENCO Support:** Appoint a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) and work with them to monitor SEND provision.
 - **Resource Allocation:** Ensure that the budget (including the notional SEN budget) is efficiently used to support pupils and that the school provides necessary facilities.
 - **Monitoring Impact:** Assess how pupils with SEND are performing and ensure they have access to the curriculum.

 - Not to discriminate against pupils with protected characteristics and prospective pupils
 - Under the Equality Act, the responsible body of the school is responsible for meeting the duties to disabled pupils:
 - For a maintained school the responsible body is the governing body or the local authority (LA).
 - Responsibility for most school functions sits with the governing body but the LA also has functions in relation to some areas, such as some admissions functions. The responsible body is whichever of the governing body or the LA is responsible for the particular function.
 - For an academy, the responsible body is the proprietor, i.e. the academy trust.
 - For an independent school, the responsible body is the proprietor.
 - For a pupil referral unit, the responsible body is the LA.

Prohibited Conduct

- Prohibited conduct is the term used for unlawful behaviour under the Equality Act. Prohibited conduct includes discrimination, harassment and victimisation.
- Discrimination includes:
 - direct discrimination;
 - indirect discrimination;
 - discrimination arising from a disability; and
 - the failure to make a reasonable adjustment.

Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

- Under the PSED, governing bodies must, in the exercise of their functions have due regard for the need to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

- Under the PSED, governing bodies must:
 - agree on one or more equality objectives every 4 years, which must then be published to make their priorities for equality available to the public – the objectives should be clearly defined, specific and measurable
 - publish annual information demonstrating PSED compliance

- Please note that:
 - The PSED applies to all protected characteristics and all public bodies.
 - Having due regard means that schools covered by the PSED need to have considered the impact of school policies and practices on pupils with protected characteristics before implementing them.
 - In order to be able to demonstrate how they had due regard, schools need to be able to refer to evidence, including the evidence used to inform a particular decision.

Accessibility Plans

- Schools must put in writing an accessibility plan that shows how the school is going to:
 - increase the participation of disabled pupils in the curriculum;
 - improve the physical environment to increase disabled pupils' access to education and the benefits,
 - facilities and services provided or offered by the school;
 - make information more accessible to disabled pupils
- When the responsible body prepares an accessibility plan, they must have regard to the need to allocate adequate resources for implementing the plan.
- A plan is for a three-year period. The timescales for accessibility plans are quite specific and a new plan must be prepared every three years, counting from 1 April 2006, when the first 'new' plans were required.
- A new plan needs to be prepared on 1 March 2027, 2030, and so on and runs for the three-year period starting on 1 April in the same years.
- During the three-year period, schools must keep their plan under review and revise it if needed.

Definition of Disability Under the Equality Act 2010

- *"A person is disabled under the Equality Act 2010 if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial'* and 'long-term'* negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities."*

**'Substantial' is more than minor or trivial, for example it takes much longer than it usually would to complete a daily task*

***'Long-term' means 12 months or more*

Practical Things Governors Can Do

- Talk to the children and parents/carers - do they know how to access support? Is the support that the children receive enabling them to make progress?
- Do the staff feel that they are adequately trained to identify and assess special educational needs?
- Is the SEN Information Report reviewed by the governing body annually? Are you receiving the appropriate evidence?
- Are you regularly reviewing the school's accessibility plan? Do you have the right evidence to support this review?
- Do the school policies and practices cause discrimination (direct and indirect)? Do they incorporate reasonable adjustments?
- Does your governance calendar accommodate checks and balances that assure you that the school is meeting its statutory responsibilities regarding special educational needs and disabilities?

[\(Slides 5-24\)](#)

RELEVANT LINKS

- [DfE SEND Reform Consultation](#)
- [Equality Act 2010 and disabled pupils: A guide for governors and trustees \(Council for Disabled Children\)](#)

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN PRIORITY 2: Alternative Learning Provision
Lead Officer: Kate Cracknell

The Alternative Learning Provision priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This will be discussed at the May 2026 Forum.

RELEVANT LINKS

- Guidance on Restrictive Interventions in Schools New DfE [guidance](#) on the use of reasonable force and other restrictive interventions will take effect from April 2026. The guidance provides clearer expectations on reporting, use of force, and specific support for staff working with pupils with SEND.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 3: Strength & Sustainability
Terry Bryan, Assistant Director, School Estate Strategy
Jo Riley, Education Advisor, School Estate Strategy

The Strength and Sustainability priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the October 2025 forum.

LOCAL UPDATES

SAVE THE DATE Governors and School Leaders Joint Conference: Building a Sustainable Future

Date: 24 June 2026 | Time: 16:00 – 19:00 Venue: Hackney Town Hall Atrium (TBC) Audience: All Governors, Headteachers, Internal Senior Officers and Local Councillors

This conference brings together Governors and leaders from across Hackney to prepare for the launch of the **Local Partnership Model** in September 2026.

Our goal is to move away from schools working in isolation and move toward a **collective approach**. By working together, we can ensure every child—especially those currently underserved—receives a high-quality education within a financially stable and equitable system.

Why This Matters

Our local strategy aligns with the 2026 National White Paper, "*Every Child Achieving and Thriving*." We will focus on:

- **Shared Responsibility:** Moving beyond "no school is an island." to a system where schools, the council, and health services are collectively accountable for all children.
- **Better Inclusion:** Fixing the SEND system by improving support for complex needs and making mainstream schools more inclusive.
- **Local Action (Place-Based Partnerships):** Using our four "neighbourhood clusters" to tackle specific challenges within local communities.

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- **Smart Building Use:** Finding creative, efficient ways to use our surplus school buildings and spaces to support the wider community and improve financial viability.
 - **Financial Future:** Ensuring our schools remain viable and our workforce stays strong, despite the challenges of falling pupil numbers.

The Goal

This event combines our previous workshops and the Annual Governor Conference into one decisive session. Your input will help shape the "big shift" toward local partnerships, ensuring our education system is robust, fair, and sustainable for the years to come.

NATIONAL UPDATES

Managing School Rolls and Maintaining Educational Standards in London

A London Councils report '[Managing School Rolls and Maintaining Educational Standards in London](#)' was published in January 2026 and analyses the continued decline in demand for school places across London. The report recommends that the government ensure sustainable school funding and provide local authorities with greater powers and flexibility to manage the consequences of declining pupil numbers, while maintaining educational standards.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 4: Sustainable School Improvement
Lead Officer: Lisa Williams, Head of School Improvement and Education Performance

The Sustainable School Improvement priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This will be discussed at a future forum.

HACKNEY EDUCATION 3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN - PRIORITY 5: Equity for Children & Families

Lead Officer: Debra Robinson, Diversity & Inclusion Systems Leader

Laura Stagg, Parent Engagement Systems Leader
Madalina Brockmann, Governance Services Manager

The Equity for Children & Families priority can be found in Hackney's 3 Year Strategic Plan [here](#). This was discussed at the January 2026 and March 2026 forums.

UPDATES

Meaningful Parental Engagement

Current Picture

The profile of parental engagement locally and nationally has rightly gained significantly over the last few years:

- Parental engagement is mentioned 21 times in the Ofsted Education Inspection Framework
- For the first time there is a strategic parental engagement team at DfE
- Moving from a 'nice to have' to 'must have' priority for schools
- There is new [guidance](#) on complaints issued by the DfE in collaboration with the charity Parent Kind
- There is a strong parent and carer commitment within [Hackney Education's 3 Year Strategic Plan](#)

Important Data from the most recent [Parer and Carer National Survey](#):

- The poorest parents are twice as likely to worry about knife crime
- 3.5 million parents have asked schools to assess their child for SEN
- Fewer than half of parents said children are well behaved at school
- 1 in 5 parents think preparing children for exams should be a school priority
- 3.7 million parents find parenting difficult
- 860,000 parents feel lonely every day
- 600,000 children share a bedroom with an adult because of lack of space
- 2 million parents sometimes ignore their child because they are on their phone
- Almost half of parents have moved house to be near a good school
- Parents spend 1.5 billion on private tutors

Supporting Parents and Carers

- How do you know how effective parent and carer engagement is in your setting?
- Understanding the needs and demographics of the community
- Using that understanding when setting visions, developing policies, budget allocation?
- Does anyone lead on parent/ carer engagement strategically?
- What is its presence in ethos, values, vision and priorities?
- How visible is the governing body to parents and carers?
- Do staff receive regular training on parental engagement and feel confident in this area?
- Do governors and senior leaders review barriers to parental engagement annually and develop solutions?

NGA's The School complaints Landscape Report 2025 - Key Findings

- 5 million formal complaints in the past year alone, estimated to have been made by parents about schools.
- 82% of governors and trustees say that complaints have increased in their setting over the past 3 to 5 years, with half (50%) reporting significant increases.
- The rising volume of complaints over the past 3 to 5 years is more prevalent for secondary phase settings (where 93% of respondents reported a rise) compared to primary (79%).
- Main topics of complaint relate to special educational needs and disability (send), teacher interaction, bullying, school management, and attendance.


- Schools and trusts are also receiving a notable amount of vexatious and unreasonable complaints.

White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving 2026

The government sets out plans to improve the school complaints system to make it clearer, more effective, and mutually respectful:

- **New Digital Solution:** Create a new digital and accessible solution for handling complaints to simplify the process, improve coordination, enhance data collection, and prevent complaints from escalating through multiple, parallel avenues.
- **Clear Expectations and Timeframes:** Set out new "mutual expectations" for complaints handling with clear and consistent timeframes to help manage expectations and provide reassurance to families.
- **Guidance on Vexatious Complaints:** Provide advice and case studies to help schools identify and handle vexatious complaints.
- **Clarified Referral Routes:** Update guidance to clarify which national organisation is best placed to consider specific complaints, reducing the number of complaints going to multiple bodies simultaneously.
- **Parent's Guide to Complaints:** Support the development of a "Parent's Guide to School Complaints" to help parents understand the process and encourage resolution at the earliest stage.
- **Strengthened Panel Independence:** Consult on a requirement for maintained schools to include an independent member on complaint panels to give families confidence that their complaint has been assessed fairly and objectively.

Concerns and Complaints Health Check for Schools

	Red	Amber	Green	Actions
Have you reviewed and updated your complaints policy in line with current best practice this year?	No	Yes	Yes and looked at best practice examples from the DfE and LA. Have incorporated lessons learnt from existing practice.	
Is the policy on the website and easily accessible?	Not on the website.	Yes, but not easily accessible even with a search function.	Yes, within two clicks or less on the website. Parent voice reflects that it is accessible.	
How confident are staff in escalating concerns and complaints where appropriate?	Staff are not confident and as a result a lot of concerns can linger or escalate quickly.	Some staff are confident and escalate appropriately.	All staff are confident in knowing when and how to escalate appropriately. This results in complaints reaching the correct stages and within reasonable timeframes.	

Hackney Support, Training and Resources for Governors

Training

NEW Hackney governor and staff free training (live and recorded) on *Strategic Leadership of Stakeholder Engagement and Complaints*:

- *Foundation* (autumn term, recording available)
- *Advanced: Complaints Appeals Panels* (spring term, recording available)
- *Case Studies and Activities* (summer term)

Resources

Free Resources - recordings, slides and toolkit:

<https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet/parent-and-carer-engagement>

- **NEW** Hackney School/Academy Concerns / Complaints Health Check
- **NEW** Hackney Complaints Policy update - 2026/27

Hackney Education Parent Engagement

- Contact: **Laura Stagg** Laura.Stagg@hackney.gov.uk / <https://www.hackneyservicesforschools.co.uk/extranet/parent-and-carer-engagement>

Hackney Education Governor Services / Complaints

- Contact: **Maddie Brockmann** madalina.brockmann@hackney.gov.uk / Governors/ Trustees and School Leaders Advice Helpline: governorservices@hackney.gov.uk

[\(Slides 25-34\)](#)

NATIONAL UPDATES

Complaints to Ofsted

Complaints about schools rose by 5% in the 2024-25 financial year, reaching 16,700 cases – the equivalent of more than 45 complaints per day. This is according to [new data released by the DfE](#). Despite this, fewer complaints met the criteria for investigation, with only 9% deemed to be qualifying, down from 12% the previous year, meaning 91% were classed as non-qualifying. The number of complaints-driven inspections also fell, with only 25 immediate inspections triggered compared to 35 previously, while in 93% of qualifying cases information was retained to be considered at the next inspection. Noting a growing trend of families bypassing schools entirely, Ofsted emphasised the need for parents to first exhaust their school's complaints procedure before going to them.

RELEVANT LINKS

Department for Education

- [Dfe Guidance - Best practice guidance for school complaints procedures 2020](#)
- [DfE Best practice guidance for academies complaints procedures \(Updated 12 March 2021\)](#)

- [Model complaint procedure](#) (non-statutory)
- [Model policy for managing serial and unreasonable complaints](#) (non-statutory)

Parentkind

- [School guide to parent complaints](#)
 - [Parent guide to school complaints](#) (2026)
 - <https://www.parentkind.org.uk/>
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HIGHLIGHT OF TRAINING FOR GOVERNORS

Hackney Education FREE ONLINE GOVERNOR TRAINING: Access our [Hackney Governor Training Padlet](#) to book and for live offers, webinars, and toolkits.

Summer Offer

- 11th June: [Governor Induction and Refresher](#)
 - 18th June: [Preparing for Ofsted](#)
 - 30th June: [Strategic Leadership of Achievement, Curriculum and Teaching](#)
 - 20th May: [Strategic Leadership of Complaints and Stakeholder Engagement \(Foundation\)](#)
 - 16th June: [Strategic Leadership of Safeguarding 2025/2026](#)
 - 12th May: [Strategic Leadership of School Finance: Budgeting and the Governance of Sustainability \(Foundation\)](#)
 - 3rd June: [Strategic Leadership of School Finance: Budgeting and the Governance of Sustainability \(Advanced\)](#)
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