

Effective MAT governance

Unit 4: Engagement

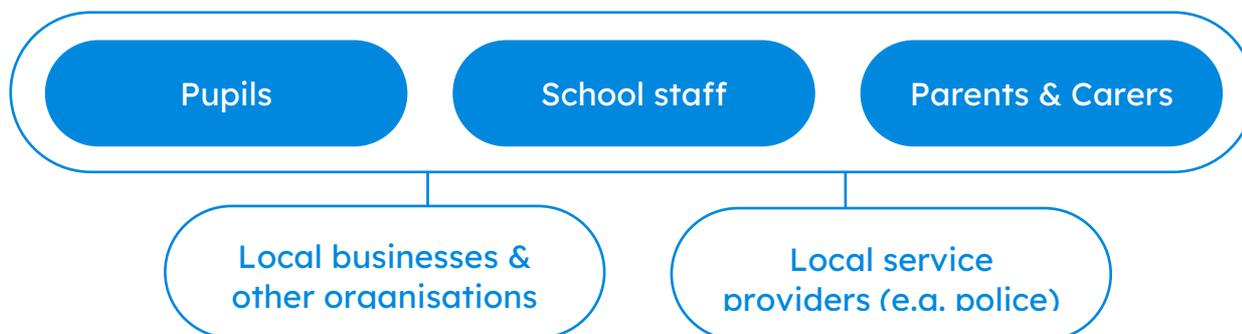
What does engagement mean?

All governing boards need to ensure that schools engage well with parents and others in a way which goes beyond the composition of the trust board and academy committee. So for example parents who are governing do not represent other parents but like all others involved in governance, use their own judgement to make decisions in the interests of pupils.

By engagement we mean communicating with parents and other stakeholders in order to seek their views and support or otherwise, taking their views into account in a meaningful way as well as keeping them informed.

Who are your stakeholders?

There is no definition of this but it includes those within the school and the wider community in which the school exists.



Purpose of engagement

Engagement is a key element of governance.

“Governance determines who has the power, who makes the decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.”

Institute on Governance, Canada

The purpose of the engagement will depend on the stakeholder. Engaging with pupils, staff and parents is an excellent way for trustees to get to know their schools and their communities, and helps to build both an understanding of their strengths, weaknesses and if the trust’s values are creating a healthy culture.

For example a trust board will want to solicit the views of parents to inform its strategic planning and to give parents the opportunity to help shape their child’s education, as well as being reflective about school performance and its own effectiveness. A trust board should not have all its information provided by school leaders: it is expected that boards get information from a range of sources.

There is no statutory requirement for academy trusts to engage with stakeholders except in certain prescribed situations (e.g. length of the school day) but the expectation to do so is clear.

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The Governance Handbook states:

“As the strategic leaders of their organisations it is vital that boards are connected with, and answerable to, the communities they serve, particularly parents/carers. Boards should never become detached, distant or unanswerable to parents or carers.”

“All boards should assure themselves that mechanisms are in place to engage meaningfully with all parents/carers and enable them to put forward their views at key points in their child’s education. They should aim to build productive relationships, creating a sense of trust and shared ownership of the organisation’s strategy, vision and operational performance.”

The current Ofsted framework expects trustees to be able to demonstrate that they have a deep, accurate understanding of the school’s effectiveness informed by the views of pupils, parents and staff. The proposed 2019 framework will consider the extent to which:

- leaders engage effectively with learners and others in their community, including – where relevant – parents, carers, employers and local services
- leaders engage with their staff and are aware and take account of the main pressures on them. They are realistic and constructive in the way they manage staff including their workload

Parents’ views play a part in the inspection process itself. As soon as a school is notified of an inspection there is a statutory duty for parents be informed about how their views can be given to inspectors. Also, in order to govern effectively, boards need to know the wider context in which their schools operate. This is one of NGA’s eight elements of effective governance and engaging with parents, pupils and others is an excellent way for those involved in governance to get to know their schools.

Engaging with stakeholders

An effective trust board will:

- Ensure that the trust is engaging effectively with stakeholders and is consulting them on key proposals
- Use stakeholder views to inform schools’ self-evaluation and strategic planning to improve the education of pupils
- Report back to stakeholders the results and the changes trustees make as a result of listening to them
- Consider information from sources independent of the school leaders to help improve the school: parents’ perceptions are a key source

Useful resources:

[Engaging with parents and carers](#)

[Being Strategic: a guide for boards and leaders](#)