



Gillian Allcroft, from the National Governors Association, talks about the responsibilities of Governing Boards in relation to SEND and considerations for their practice to help meet them.

THE THREE CORE FUNCTIONS OF A GOVERNING BOARD ARE TO:

- set the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school,
- hold the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and
- ensure the school's money is well spent.

These three functions do not operate in isolation.

The first of these means that all governing boards should have a clear articulated vision of where they want the school to be in three to five years' time, which provides a robust framework for setting priorities, creating accountability and monitoring progress in realising the school's vision. The vision and strategy needs to encompass all the pupils in the school, including those with SEND.

The board is instrumental in setting the ethos and culture of the school. Governing boards have a vital role to play in ensuring that their schools are welcoming, nurturing

and inclusive of all children and young people, and recognising and celebrating the achievements of children and young people with SEND is a step towards this.

In relation to SEND, the Children and Families Act 2014 provides the legal basis for educational provision and in particular makes clear that the responsibility for ensuring that the needs of children are met lies with the governors/trustees i.e. the governing board. The Act states that, where a pupil has SEND, the board "must, in exercising its functions in relation to the school or other institution, use its best endeavours to secure that the special educational provision called for by the pupil's or student's special educational needs is made". This duty is further underpinned and defined in more detail by a number of regulations and the statutory guidance contained in the 'Special educational needs and disability code of practice' (SEND CoP).

Consequently, the legal responsibility for ensuring that:

- the school has a SENCO,
 - information about the admission of pupils with SEND is published,
 - the school co-operates in the development of a local offer and
 - the school's policy for pupils with SEND is published
- all reside with the governing board.

By far the most important of these responsibilities is that described in the Act i.e. the 'best endeavours' provision mentioned above, which means that governing boards must have mechanisms in place to assure themselves that pupils with SEND are receiving the support they need and that outcomes for these pupils are good.

SO HOW DOES THE BOARD DO THIS?

The starting point must be to ensure that all members of the governing board understand what is meant by SEND and their responsibilities towards pupils with SEND.

Induction arrangements should be in place for those joining, which should include at least some basic information about SEND. Although not all board members need to have the same level of knowledge about all aspects of its work, all should have an

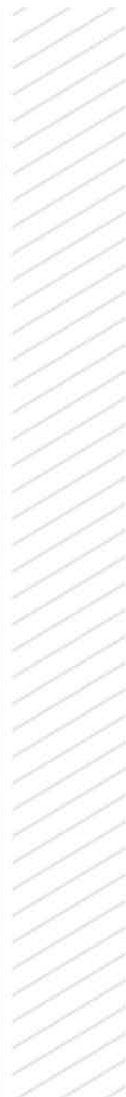
overall knowledge of how the school or (in a multi-academy trust or federation) schools, is performing. This must include information about outcomes for pupils with SEND.

Most governing boards now carry out regular skills audits to identify gaps in the skills, knowledge and experience of their members. The NGA Skills Audit includes specific reference to having an understanding of SEND. You can find the audit at <http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Governance-Tools/Skills-Audit.aspx>

The third core function of the governing body is ensuring the money is well spent. A proper strategic plan is one which comes with resources attached — otherwise it is just words. Pupils with an Education, Health, Care plan may come with additional identifiable funding but this will not be the case for pupils with SEND without a plan. However, all schools will have a sum of money in their budget called the 'notional SEN budget' which is not ring-fenced or attached to specific pupils but is derived from other existing factors e.g. low prior attainment, free school meals eligibility. Governing boards are responsible for approving the budget and one of the questions that the board should ask is how the budget will support provision for pupils with SEND.

Having put in place its vision and a strategic plan on how to achieve it, the board needs to monitor progress. This is expressed in the second core function, which is holding the head teacher to account.

Historically, many governing boards have a named governor for SEND. Although this can be useful, allocating specific responsibilities to one governor does not



YOUR SAY
Have you had the appropriate training to care for autistic children?
nasenconnect@nasen.org.uk



absolve the rest of the governing board of its responsibilities. The NGA's view is that SEND should be in the specific remit of one of the board's committees and that committee should receive regular reports about the provision and progress of pupils with SEND. While it is useful, if you appoint one, for the SEND governor to come into school and meet the SENCO it may be more valuable for the SENCO to be invited to come to a board committee meeting where all the committee members can receive an update and ask direct questions (and vice versa).

There is a range of information that the governing board should receive about pupils with SEND. The board should agree with the head teacher and SENCO what information it wants and when. Information about the progress of SEND pupils should be provided in line with that of other pupils in the school (at least termly) but in addition the board should be looking annually at trends over a three-year period in terms of the number of pupils with SEND, the type of their SEND and what the three-year performance trend for these pupils looks like. As well as using this data for this specific group of pupils, comparisons should be made with those without SEND. This is so that the governing board can ensure that provision and progress for pupils with SEND is not significantly different from those without SEND. Governing boards also need to know: how children's needs

are identified, how staff are kept informed about identified needs and whether those needs are being met.

Governing boards should also ask about staffing: what continuing professional development (CPD) is being made available to ensure that staff are equipped to identify any special needs and then provide day to day support for them? If CPD has been provided is there evidence that it has helped and made a difference to classroom practice? How does the school ensure that pupils with SEND can access the curriculum, extra-curricular activities and

any school trips? If there are any barriers to inclusion of SEND children, what steps need to be taken to overcome these barriers? Particularly, what action is required of the governing board to remove these barriers? The SEND policy should also be regularly reviewed to ensure it is still

fit for purpose. Does the policy reflect statutory requirements and what happens in the school, or is it simply a paper document which once written is known only to the SENCO and head teacher?

An effective governing board is one which sets a culture and ethos which is welcoming and provides an environment in which all pupils can thrive and reach their full potential. Ultimately, the best governing boards and staff, while making appropriate provision for pupils with SEND, do not identify them by a label — but simply as children and young people.

“The vision and strategy needs to encompass all the pupils in the school”

BIO

GILLIAN ALLCROFT

Gillian is the Deputy Chief Executive of the National Governors' Association. You can follow the NGA on Twitter using @NGAMedia