



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Research Paper

9 December 2024

Colin Knox

School Governance

NIAR 203-2024

This paper examines school governance with a specific focus on accountability relationships between School Governors, School Principals, Managing Authorities and the Department of Education in Northern Ireland. Crucially, it considers the accountability of Governors to Parents as a key stakeholder in pupils' education journey.

Paper 52/24

NIAR-203-2024

Research and Information Service briefings are compiled for the benefit of MLAs and their support staff. Authors are available to discuss the contents of these papers with Members and their staff but cannot advise members of the general public. We do, however, welcome written evidence that relates to our papers and this should be sent to the Research and Information Service, Northern Ireland Assembly, Room 139, Parliament Buildings, Belfast BT4 3XX or e-mailed to Raisescu@niassembly.gov.uk

Key Points

- The education system in Northern Ireland is a complex arrangement of different school types and governance arrangements, over which 11,000 volunteer school governors preside.
- School governors have significant responsibilities to ensure that schools provide a good education for their pupils. Their statutory duties include: setting the school's strategic direction; overseeing the school's finances; employing staff; and holding the school's leadership to account.
- The Department of Education (DE) sets overall educational policies and provides funding for, and oversight of, schools. The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) provides independent advice to DE on the quality of education and training.
- DE can also exercise legislative powers in relation to Boards of Governors where it deems it necessary to intervene. The Department prefers to work collaboratively with Managing Authorities and schools to resolve governance issues respecting the principle, where possible, of local management of schools.
- Governors receive no formal training but 'are expected to participate' in a range of development courses offered by the Education Authority. It is difficult to see how they can adequately perform their role without participating in these voluntary professional development opportunities.
- Given the difficult financial circumstances in which many schools find themselves, governors inevitably tend to focus on budgetary issues and staffing matters, hence their role is more about internal oversight than being accountable to parents as key stakeholders in pupils' learning journey.

- Parental accountability therefore tends to be reactionary rather than participative. Schools have written complaints procedures in place with the option to refer to the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman, should resolution within the school prove impossible.
- Parent governors have an important role to play in ensuring BoGs are accountable to pupils' parents but that level of external accountability is limited given the demands of their oversight role which has an internal school-centred focus.
- Governance models from other parts of the UK, Ireland and internationally provide examples where engaged parents can be a significant support to schools' efforts in learning and teaching and influential in education policy.
- Northern Ireland could learn lessons on how to improve parental engagement and, as a result, become more accountable to parents as key partners in pupils' learning journey.
- Greater parental engagement would help schools in their efforts to build "strong links with the community", a key requirement in the Department of Education's *Policy for Sustainable Schools*. Engaging with parents would require additional training and support on the part of BoGs and schools, respectively. Yet, the training burden on governors is already significant.
- In the absence of wide-ranging parental engagement, the views of an important stakeholder in the education system are missing. A recent survey of parents offers insights into the opinions of parents in Northern Ireland, how these could inform education policy going forward, and a framework for home-school partnerships.

Contents

Key Points	1
1 Introduction	4
2 Context	5
2.1 Types of schools and governance structures	6
3 Accountability of School Board of Governors	9
3.1 Accountability criteria	10
4 Accountability and the Department of Education	13
5 Schools' accountability to parents	17
6 What do existing studies tell us about BoGs' accountability?	19
7 Accountability in other jurisdictions	22
7.1 England	23
7.2 Scotland	24
7.3 Wales	26
7.4 Republic of Ireland	27
8 Parents' Voices in the UK	28
9 Conclusions	31
10 Appendix 1: Membership of BoGs	33
11 Appendix 2: Some International Examples	38
11.1 Finland	38
11.2 United States	38
11.3 Australia	39
11.4 Sweden	40
12 Appendix 3: Parent-Friendly Schools	41

1 Introduction

There are multiple stakeholders involved in the education system in Northern Ireland: the Department of Education, Education and Training Inspectorate, School Managing Authorities, School Principals, and the school community of parents, staff and pupils. The aim of this research paper is to consider the different types of accountabilities which school governors in Northern Ireland have in performing their voluntary role of ensuring that schools provide pupils with a good education. The accountability criteria within which BoGs function tend to have an internal focus on the operational workings of schools, holding the principal and school leadership to account for the educational performance, and financial stewardship of resources.

As the financial climate becomes more challenging for schools to conduct their daily business, this internal focus can displace external accountability to the wider stakeholder community of parents. These tensions are reinforced by the demands of external scrutiny bodies such as the Northern Ireland Audit Office and the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman. In addition, tensions exist in achieving a balance between the concept of local management of schools (LMS) and oversight by the Department of Education and Managing Authorities. At the centre of this accountability labyrinth is school BoGs.

This research will therefore consider the extent to which the current educational system in Northern Ireland prioritises two strands of accountability: Boards of Governors' (BoGs) accountability to parents and the Department of Education. Drawing on comparative sources within the UK, Republic of Ireland and internationally, the paper will also consider ways to strengthen BoGs' accountability to parents.

2 Context

Every school which is funded or grant-aided by government in Northern Ireland is managed by a Board of Governors (BoGs) who are volunteers from a variety of backgrounds and work with the School Principal to meet the educational needs of pupils. Currently there are approximately 11,000 governor positions in Northern Ireland. There is a wide variation in the composition of BoGs – some in the state sectors have as many as 27 while others have only eight. In the voluntary grammar sector the range is from nine to 36.¹ Governors oversee the education of some 355,000 pupils in almost 1,500 school settings.

Typically, BoGs are representative of people from the local community. They need not be educational experts but should support the ethos of the school. Governors are expected to “use their own knowledge, skills and experience combined with the abilities of other Board members to govern, challenge and support the school leadership to promote school improvement in the best interests of pupils.”²

Under the school’s Scheme of Management, a governor can remain in post until either being reappointed or replaced. How a governor is recruited and appointed depends on their governor category. Parent and teacher governors are elected by the school parents and teachers respectively. Foundation, transferor and trustee governors are appointed by representatives of the key stakeholders of the school, while the Department of Education (DE) and the Education Authority (EA) appoint members of the general public with an interest in education. Although nominated/appointed by different groups, all governors have the same role and voting rights (except for co-opted members).³

DE recently reconstituted BoGs for the current four-year term of office (2024-2028). The composition of the BoGs in each of the various types of school in the NI system was laid down by the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986,

¹ [Investing in a Better Future - Volume 2.pdf \(independentreviewofeducation.org.uk\)](#)

² [Becoming a School Governor A4 \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

³ [Department of Education: School Governors](#)

and the Education (NI) Order 1997 (see Appendix 1 for details of membership of Board of Governors by governor category).

2.1 Types of schools and governance structures

The Northern Ireland education system is a complex mosaic of schools and governance structures summarised in the table below for the school year 2023/24.⁴

⁴ These tables update the Ulster University Briefing Paper *Transforming Education: The Governance of Schools* (Report 05, 2020) by Dr Matthew Milliken. Data for school year: 2023/24. Source: NISRA [Annual Enrolments 2023-24](#)

Table: Total primary, special and secondary pupils school year 2023/24 = 334,019

Controlled Schools (130,375 pupils)				
Managing Authority: Education Authority (EA) through Boards of Governors				
Other stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Transferors Representative Council (TRC) ▪ Controlled Schools Support Council (CSSC) ▪ NI Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) 				
Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publicly owned, funded by the EA ▪ Staff paid by DE ▪ Contracting Authority is EA ▪ EA provides maintenance facility management 				
School types:				
Primary 352 schools	Secondary 47 schools	Special 39 schools	Grammar 16 schools	Integrated 25 Primary 6 Secondary

Voluntary Grammar (51,111 pupils)				
Managing Authority: Each School's Board of Governors				
Other stakeholders: Governing Bodies Association (GBA) funded by DE to provide support and advice to voluntary grammar schools on area planning				
Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-governing ▪ Governors appointed in line with each school's scheme of management ▪ BoGs employs all staff (teaching and non-teaching) 				
School types:				
Preparatory (under other management) 11 schools	Grammar (under other management) 21 schools	Grammar (under Catholic management) 29 schools		

Catholic Maintained (123, 638 pupils)				
Managing Authority: Catholic Council for Maintained Schools (CCMS)				
Other stakeholders: Catholic Schools Trustee Service Representative Council (TRC) Commission for Catholic Education				
Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff paid by DE ▪ Staff employed by CCMS 				

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contracting Authority is EA EA provides maintenance facility management 				
School types:				
Primary 351 schools	Secondary 56 schools	Special 1 school		

Grant Maintained Integrated (17,493 pupils)				
Managing Authority: Each School's Board of Governors				
Other stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> NICIE (sectoral body) Integrated Education Fund 				
Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-governing Employs all staff (teaching and non-teaching) 				
School types				
Primary 23 schools	Secondary 15 schools			

Irish Medium (6,488 pupils)				
Managing Authority: Various There are Controlled and Maintained Irish-Medium schools and units. Maintained schools are Voluntary schools owned by trustees and managed by boards of governors				
Other stakeholders: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta (CnaG) Iontaobhas na Gaelscolaíochta (InaG) 				
Governance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In line with the managing authority (controlled; maintained; other maintained) 				
School types				
Primary 28 schools	IM Units in English medium primary schools 7 units	Secondary schools 2 schools	IM Units in English medium secondary schools 3 units	

3 Accountability of School Board of Governors

According to the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland (2023):
“Accountability is crucial. Education is a public good and public confidence in its design and delivery is vital... Boards of Governors play an essential role in reviewing critically performance data for their schools.”⁵

BoG members represent the interests of, and should therefore be collectively accountable to:

- Those who originally founded the school i.e. foundation governors (represented by transferors or trustees).
- Those who fund the education system (tax-payers) represented by the Education Authority and Department of Education governors.
- The pupils enrolled at the school represented by parent governors.⁶
- The school staff represented by teacher governors.

Statutory functions of the BoG include:

- Setting the school’s vision, aims, plans and policies.
- Establishing and maintaining the school’s ethos.
- Monitoring and evaluating school performance.
- Managing school funds economically, effectively and efficiently in line with published guidance.
- Curriculum planning, including examinations management and administration policy.
- Employment issues such as selecting and appointing staff, staff conduct, discipline and grievances.

⁵ [Investing in a Better Future - Volume 1.pdf \(independentreviewofeducation.org.uk\)](#)

⁶ There is a difference between parent governors and parent teacher associations (PTAs). The former works alongside the Board of Governors to keep the Headteacher accountable for the strategic direction of the school. The latter are voluntary groups that work alongside the school to offer the best possible educational experience for all pupils. Generally, PTAs are involved in raising funds for their school, holding events to build the school community, enhancing communication between parents and schools, and helping parents have a voice in the school: [Parentkind: Involvement in School Life](#)

- Pupil pastoral care and protection issues.

The BoGs assume corporate responsibility for governing the school and vote on key changes that impact on the school, pupils and staff – there is no personal liability in respect of any action taken in good faith in the exercise of the Board’s delegated duties and responsibilities.⁷

Governors are required to make a distinction between governance and management. Governors do not involve themselves in the day-to-day management of the school but provide support and challenge to the Principal and senior leadership team – a critical friend role where they ask challenging questions of the Principal and not simply ‘rubber stamping’ his/her decisions.

3.1 Accountability criteria

The accountability of BoGs can broadly be described in three ways:

- Holding the head teacher to account for day-to-day running of schools.
- Holding school leadership to account for improving pupil and staff performance.
- Accountability for financial performance.

Under Local Management of Schools (LMS), introduced in 1991, schools receive a budget based on the Common Funding Formula. This budget is delegated to the BoG and Principal to manage the school effectively and efficiently (within budget). Governors must hold the Principal to account for the quality of education and how the school’s funds are managed.⁸ The overarching accountability framework the BoG operates within is DE’s *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools* (Sustainable Schools Policy) which is used “to ensure all schools have access to a broad and balanced curriculum that meets their educational needs in a school that is **educationally** and **financially viable** and takes account of the **expressed preference of parents**

⁷ [Becoming a School Governor A4 \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/education-ni/education-ni-articles/2019/04/becoming-a-school-governor-a4)

⁸ [NI Audit Office Good Practice Guide - School Governance_0.pdf](#)

for a diverse education system.”⁹ [author’s emphasis]. The accountability criteria are both quantitative and qualitative as follows:

- Quality of the educational experience.
- Stable enrolment trends.
- Sound financial position.
- School leadership and management.
- Accessibility.
- Strength of links to the local community.

We select three of the criteria above¹⁰ which best illustrate the type of internal and external accountability requirements on BoGs (see table below).

Accountability Criteria	Indicators
Quality Educational Experience	<p>Attainment levels of pupils¹¹, Key Stage tests pending development of new indicators for Primary Schools, and GCSE results for Post-Primary Schools.</p> <p>No more than two composite year groups in a single classroom at primary school level.</p> <p>A minimum of four teachers in a primary school. This recognises both the needs of pupils and the demands on teachers.</p> <p>The ability of the school to cater for children with Special Educational Needs.</p> <p>The ability at post-primary level to be able to provide suitable access to the Entitlement Framework including, where</p>

⁹ [Sustainable Schools Policy \(SSP\) User Guide - February 2022 - Final.pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ The remaining three criteria have multiple indicators and also highlight different facets of governors’ accountability: responsibility for enrolment trends in the past three years and projected demand (stable enrolment trends); composition of the BoG in terms of skills and experience and their views on the school (school leadership and management); and home to school transport travel times (accessibility). In interests of space, we have excluded the detail.

¹¹ Given the importance of factors such as the background of the children, the socio-economic conditions in the community and levels of parental support in pupils’ attainment levels, DE is working towards a contextualised ‘value-added’ approach. In other words, starting from a baseline of knowledge, which will be different for each child given these contextual factors, what does a school add to a pupil’s learning journey.

Accountability Criteria	Indicators
	<p>appropriate, linkages with other schools, the Further Education sector or other providers.</p> <p>The standards and the quality of learning and teaching at the school.</p> <p>The range of curricular and extra-curricular activities available for children including Career Guidance, Physical Education, Music, Art, Drama and Science.</p> <p>The quality of the physical environment for learning and teaching i.e. the condition, energy and water efficiency and suitability of the buildings.</p> <p>The quality of, and arrangements for, pastoral care including the active promotion of the principles of social justice in all areas of the formal and informal curriculum.</p>
Sound Financial Position	<p>The school's annual finances indicate that it can live within its delegated budget.</p> <p>The school's financial trends indicate that it will continue to be able to live within its annually delegated budget.</p> <p>The school's three-year financial plans, based upon realistic assumptions, indicate that where there is a deficit this can be substantially reduced or recovered.</p>
Strong links with the community	<p>Degree and quality of parental involvement (schools will be asked to provide evidence of this).</p> <p>Number of children in the vicinity attending (and not attending) the school.</p> <p>Contribution of the school to the community (schools will be asked to provide evidence of this).</p> <p>Presence of other features of provision e.g. nursery or specialist unit.</p> <p>Multi-functional use of buildings outside formal education (sport, voluntary and community use).</p>

Source: Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools (February 2022)¹² – author’s emphasis.

Aside from the importance and measurement of the quality of the educational experience and financial oversight of the school, we highlight two key indicators which attempt to capture the external or ‘outward-facing’ nature of BoGs’ accountability: the degree and quality of parental involvement and the contribution of the school to the community. An important issue is the extent to which BoGs reflect these metrics (‘strong links with the community’) in their operational role.

4 Accountability and the Department of Education

The role of DE is to set strategic aims for the education service and to develop policies and proposals for legislation that will make provision for these aims to be achieved. DE’s Corporate Plan 2023-28 [Every CHILD](#) outlines its five strategic priorities as follows:

- Championing the needs and aspirations of all our children and young people and the positive impact of education.
- Helping all our children and young people by supporting their well-being and learning.
- Inspiring all our children and young people to make a positive contribution to society.
- Meeting the learning needs of our children and young people and developing their knowledge and skills, enabling them to fulfil their potential; and
- Delivering an effective, child-first, collaborative and high-quality education system.

DE has statutory powers to intervene with a Board of Governors to ensure that schools meet their obligations and provide a high standard of education. The

¹² [Sustainable Schools Policy \(SSP\) User Guide - February 2022 - Final.pdf \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

Department derives its statutory powers to intervene with the BoG from several pieces of legislation. These powers are primarily aimed at addressing issues of governance, performance and compliance in order to ensure schools are effectively governed, compliant with laws, and provide high quality education.

Typical areas where DE can intervene are as follows¹³:

1. **Policy and legislative oversight:** DE sets the education policies and legislative framework within which BoGs operate. The Department ensures compliance with statutory duties such as the delivery of the Northern Ireland curriculum, health and safety standards, and adherence to safeguarding regulations. DE can require a BoG to address deficiencies in policies, training, or implementation of safeguarding measures.
2. **School performance** - inspection and monitoring. DE draws on inspection reports of the Education and Inspectorate (ETI) to assess the performance of schools. If the school is deemed to be under-performing DE can direct the BoG to implement a school improvement plan or special measures. DE can provide additional resources or external expertise to help in this process of improvement.
3. **Financial management:** DE can monitor the financial performance of schools and can intervene if: budgets are mismanaged or funds used inappropriately; schools are running significant deficits; or there are specific measures needed to restore financial stability. DE can initiate a financial recovery plan requiring regular progress reports from the BoG. In extreme circumstances, DE can withhold or redirect funding if the BoG does not comply with statutory obligations or fails to follow a direction issued by DE.
4. **School Governance:** DE can appoint additional governors or replace existing ones if it deems the BoG to be ineffective in fulfilling its responsibilities. This action is reserved for cases of severe dysfunction or

¹³ Please note: these areas are not exhaustive or definitive but rather, indicative and **not** to be read as legal guidance. A full list of primary and subordinate legislation available to DE is available at: [DE legislation](#)

persistent failure on the part of a BoG. Examples of such governance dysfunction could include: allegations of corruption, misuse of funds or persistent non-compliance with policies. DE can issue statutory direction, replace governors, or appoint external governors to restore effective governance in these circumstances.

5. **Transformation:** If a school is underperforming or deemed unsustainable, DE can work with the BoG and Managing Authority to facilitate closure or amalgamation with another school. DE must approve significant changes proposed by BoGs in the form of a development proposal such as expanding or reducing school size, closing a school, or transforming to integrated status.

While the above indicates that DE has significant powers to intervene, the Department typically acts in collaboration with managing authorities such as the Education Authority and CCMS. DE primarily aims to guide support and ensure compliance rather than micro-manage the day-to-day governance of schools.

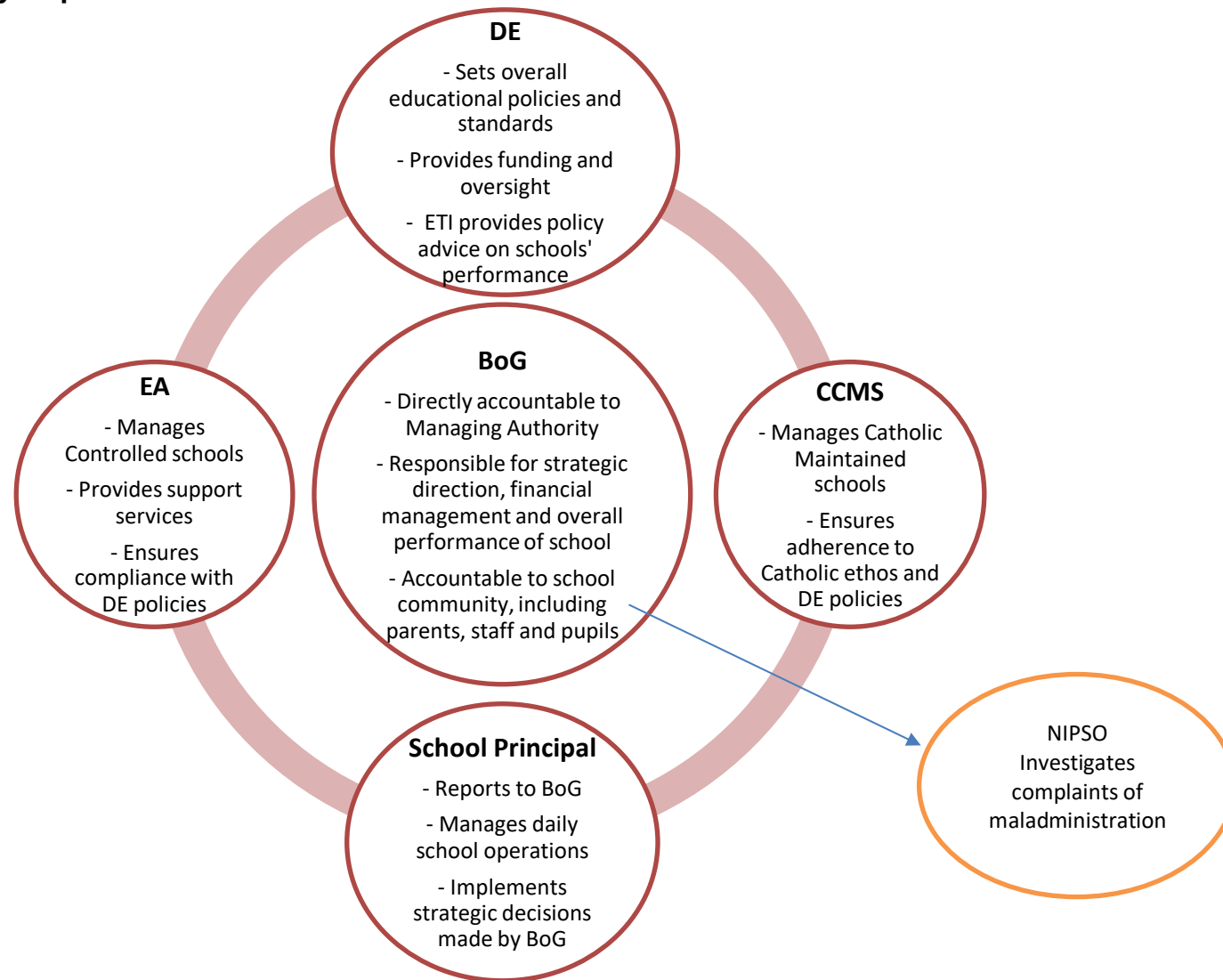
On school governance, The Independent Review of Education concluded:

The current approach to school governance is complex and diverse, lacking consistency across sectors and stages and adding the perception of a fragmented system. This involves differences in numbers of governors, appointment routes and the range of interests represented. These differences reflect a complex history. However, it is not clear that the current model is in the best interests of the learner.¹⁴

See overview of schools' data by Managing Authority and associated accountability map of the education system in Northern Ireland in the diagram below.

¹⁴ Independent Review of Education (2023, Volume 2): 269

Education Accountability Map



5 Schools' accountability to parents

BoGs' emphasis on **internal** financial accountability is perhaps unsurprising. The Education Authority stated in reviewing its budget position for 2024-25 that approximately 40% of schools had been in financial deficit at the end of March 2023. At the end of March 2024, 50% of schools were in financial deficit and, if no further funding was allocated to schools in 2024-25, this figure would rise to 80%.¹⁵

In terms of **external** accountability, NI Audit had little to say about accountability of BoGs to parents.

External accountability must also be considered, in relation to how the school manages relationships with third parties who have a role in holding the school to account. This includes ensuring governors are aware of the external scrutiny from educational bodies such as DE, EA or the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS) and the formal accountability involved.¹⁶

Notable by its absence is accountability to parents which appears enshrined in complaints policies rather than prior engagement processes. So, how do parents hold schools to account for their children's learning?

Parents with concerns about their child's learning typically go through the following stages:

1. Approach the child's teacher or head of year (by appointment) and, thereafter, the Principal if the response is unsatisfactory.
2. If the complaint is not resolved, the next stage is to approach the BoG in writing – all schools should have a written complaints procedure.
3. Some procedures may allow for an additional stage if the Education Authority, Council for Catholic Maintained Schools or another external

¹⁵ [Minutes of Education Authority June 2024](#)

¹⁶ [NI Audit Office Good Practice Guide - School Governance 0.pdf](#)

agency provides an independent appeal or review. The EA and CCMS are also required to set up a procedure for dealing with complaints.

4. From April 2017 the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (NIPSO) has the power to investigate and report on complaints about maladministration in publicly funded schools. This means that any pupil or parent who believes that they have been treated unfairly as a result of the actions or decision of a School's BoG can bring a complaint to the Ombudsman.¹⁷

NIPSO reported that they received 81, 68 and 87 complaints in 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 respectively from nursery, primary post-primary and special schools collectively, a total of 236 complaints.¹⁸ In the period 2017-2022, the nature of complaints by theme were: poor record keeping (n = 20); poor communication of results (n = 20); not following school complaints policy (n = 17); how the school handled a situation (n = 12); failure to follow school policy (n = 12); concerns over SEN plans and arrangements (n=9); how the Principal handled an issue/incident (n = 7); failure to signpost complaints procedure (n = 7); and bullying (n = 5).¹⁹

Not all these complaints warrant further investigation and the Ombudsman's office will try to facilitate early resolution in the interest of maintaining ongoing relationships. In investigating a complaint, the role of NIPSO is primarily concerned with administrative actions. It is not NIPSO's role to investigate every decision of a teacher, principal or school.

¹⁷ [Making a complaint to your child's school | nidirect](#)

¹⁸ NIPSO paper to the Committee for Education from the NI Public Services Ombudsman

¹⁹ [Case Digest – School Complaints | NIPSO](#)

6 What do existing studies tell us about BoGs' accountability?

Previous research (2010) noted the increasing scope in the role and responsibilities of the BoGs and raised concerns over their lack of capacity in meeting these challenges. In a survey (n = 751) of schools' governors some 95% of governors agreed or strongly agreed that they had the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to effectively discharge their role. There were, however, differences by category of governor, with parent governors less likely to have confidence in their abilities; and by school management type, with governors in Voluntary Grammar Schools more likely to be confident.²⁰ For example, 33% of parent governors felt confident that they had the necessary skills, experience and knowledge to fulfill their duties as a governor 'to a great extent' compared with 71% of foundation governors. Similarly, 17% of governors in Controlled Integrated Schools felt confident they had the skills, experience and knowledge to perform their duties compared with 55% of Grammar School governors.

A research paper for the Northern Ireland Assembly (2011) raised issues about the challenge function that BoGs have been able to perform, arguing that they find it difficult to carry out this role, preferring to accept proposals from the Principal rather than taking a lead in helping to shape decisions. The research called for greater support for BoGs to adopt a "high challenge, high support" approach to governance.²¹

The most recent Education and Training Inspectorate report available at the time of writing noted that: In most cases, governors are supportive of school leaders and they challenge appropriately the strategic direction, outcomes and management of the school. Most effectively, governors engage regularly with school leaders and subject co-ordinators to evaluate the provision and

²⁰ [Research reports 2010 - School Governors: The guardians of our schools | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/research-reports/2010-school-governors-the-guardians-of-our-schools)

²¹ Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service: School Governors, Caroline Perry (2011) Paper 86/11. Accessible at: [School governors \(niassembly.gov.uk\)](https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/school-governors)

outcomes of the pupils. In a minority of the schools inspected, the governors fail to challenge and lack appropriate strategic overview of the schools' provision and outcomes.²²

A report by the School of Education, UNESCO Centre (2020) pointed out that training for governors is voluntary and is provided for all sectors by the Education Authority. There was no mechanism for auditing the training needs of the BoGs.²³ The guidance from the Education Authority which provides training courses (such as effective governance, safeguarding and finance)²⁴ is that 'governors are expected to undertake training to enable them to fulfil their role'.²⁵

The Northern Ireland Audit Office (2023) identified a number of challenges facing governors who act in a voluntary capacity in relation to their accountability responsibilities to DE or the EA for public money and ensuring the best outcomes for learners:

- It is difficult for schools to establish and retain a diverse group of governors with the mix of skills and experience required.
- The scope of duties expected of governors is complex, wide-ranging and increasing.
- The time commitment required can discourage potential volunteers.
- There is a risk of nepotism, favouring relatives or friends for teaching positions.²⁶

One of the core principles of public life, referred to as the Nolan principles²⁷, which is central to good governance in any public body is accountability.

²² ETI Chief Inspector's Report (2018) [ETI Report](#)

²³ [Report_05_The_Governance_of_Schools.pdf \(ulster.ac.uk\)](#)

²⁴ [Governor Training & Resources | Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](#)

²⁵ [Apply to become a School Governor | Education Authority Northern Ireland \(eani.org.uk\)](#)

²⁶ [NI Audit Office Good Practice Guide - School Governance_0.pdf](#)

²⁷ Nolan set out seven principles of public life: integrity, openness, objectivity, accountability, leadership, honesty and selflessness.

Governors are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions with respect to public money and achieving the best outcome for learners, and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.²⁸

As shown in Appendix 1, all schools have both teacher and parent governors but the number varies depending on the size of the school and management type. For parent governors this can range from one (Voluntary Grammar schools with overall total of nine governors) up to six (primary and secondary Grant-Maintained Integrated schools with overall total of 24 governors). The Independent Review of Education (2023) noted that ‘the current approach to school governance is complex and diverse, lacking consistency across the sectors and stages... this involves differences in the number of governors, appointment routes and the range of interests represented. It is not clear that the current model is in the best interests of the learner.’²⁹

The Independent Review concluded:

At present governors may be appointed by DE or the EA or both but, in future, all appointments should be by DE alone... These arrangements need to be simplified and, to some extent, standardised to reflect best practice in organisational governance. However, the simplification arrangements is secondary to ensuring their effectiveness... Governors should be trained for their roles and have the confidence to deliver their functions.³⁰

The Independent Review of Education argued that educational institutions are not directly accountable either to learners or, in the earlier stages, to their parents. Instead, schools are immediately accountable to their BoGs and report ultimately to government through DE. The Review suggested that the ETI plays

²⁸ [NI Audit Office Good Practice Guide - School Governance_0.pdf](#)

²⁹ [Investing in a Better Future: Independent Review of Education Volume 2](#)

³⁰ [Investing in a Better Future: Independent Review of Education Volume 1](#)

an important role in relation to accountability and its position in legislation should be strengthened.³¹

Existing research, reviews and reports in education therefore tended to focus on the complexity of the role and responsibilities of BoGs, not least in carrying out financial and management oversight. For example, the Northern Ireland Audit schools' governance guidance noted that BoGs "should pay particular attention to the principles of good financial management... ensuring that expenditure is contained within the approved budget... and that value for money considerations are taken into account in reaching decisions and in their execution."³²

7 Accountability in other jurisdictions

Looking at other regions of the UK, school governors provide strategic leadership and accountability in schools in England and Wales. Scotland does not have a formal system of school governance and instead schools have Parent Councils to maintain links with the school community. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, governors have similar roles and responsibilities but there are differences in governance structures and composition on the boards. Broadly the board's role is to hold the headteacher to account for exercising his/her professional judgement over the educational performance of the school and for internal organisation and management of the school. The board, alongside the headteacher and senior leaders, must agree the strategic priorities of the school, including processes of accountability and monitoring. For example, the board and senior leadership team may develop a school development plan setting out strategic targets and key performance indicators (KPIs).³³ The Republic of Ireland has a different school governance structure in which all schools have a patron. The patron typically established the school, defines the ethos, appoints the board of management, and performs an

³¹ [Investing in a Better Future - Volume 2.pdf \(independentreviewofeducation.org.uk\)](#)

³² [NI Audit Office Good Practice Guide - School Governance_0.pdf](#)

³³ [School Governance Briefing Paper Nancy Wilkinson and Robert Long House of Commons Library](#)

oversight role. Types of patrons include both religious (Catholic Church, Church of Ireland) and secular organisations (Education and Training Boards).

We consider in more detail each of the jurisdictions below.

7.1 England

There is a variety of schools in England: those controlled by local authorities known as maintained schools; those controlled by the Secretary of State referred to as academies; and, independent schools (mostly controlled by charities or private ‘for profit’ schools).³⁴

The governing board in a maintained school is the accountable body for the school. It is a distinct legal identity and its role and functions are set out in law. Most maintained schools have their own governing board, although some are part of a federation and share a governing board with another school.

Maintained school governing bodies must have: at least two parent governors, elected where possible; the headteacher; one elected staff governor; and one local authority governor. Faith schools may also appoint foundation governors nominated by the appropriate religious body. The board may then appoint as many co-opted governors as appropriate (although no more than one-third of the total number on the board).

For maintained schools the functions of the governing body are:

- That the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined.
- That the headteacher carries out their responsibilities to ensure the best educational performance of the school.
- The sound, proper and effective use of the school’s financial resources.

Academies, both single academy trusts and multi-academy trusts, as charitable companies, have both trustees and members. The trustees must ensure

³⁴ There are also non-maintained special schools with almost all their pupils publicly funded through Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans; and Section 41 schools approved by the Secretary of State where parent or young person can request to be named in an EHC plan.

compliance with charity law and are accountable to Parliament and the Secretary of State. Members of academy trusts have a similar role as shareholders in a company limited by shares. Governors are members of a local governing body within a multi-academy trust. They are responsible for the day-to-day running of an individual academy within the trust. In essence, trustees oversee the entire trust, members are the legal owners of the trust, and governors oversee the individual academies within the trust.

An interesting development in some English schools has been the appointment of “well-being governors” whose specific role is to oversee mental health initiatives and ensure these are adequately prioritised in the school’s strategic goals. The well-being governor: acts as the point of contact on the governing board for staff member(s) tasked with overseeing mental health and well-being provisions within the school; is a mental health champion for the school; and builds links with professional networks who can offer guidance and support to school in developing provision.³⁵ The appointment of well-being governors has emerged largely in response to rising parental concerns about mental health crises among young people, particularly exacerbated by the COVID lockdowns, academic pressures and social media influences.

7.2 Scotland

Local authorities are mainly responsible for education in Scotland.³⁶ Scotland does not have a formal system of school governance like other parts of the UK, but schools do have Parent Councils to connect with the community.

There are two bodies: a Parent Forum and the Parent Council. The former is the collective name for every parent or carer at a school. The Scottish (Parental Involvement) Act 2006 gives each school’s Parent Forum the right to set up a

³⁵ [Well-being Governors](#)

³⁶ Independent schools are not operated by a local authority or grant-aided. The proprietor, often referred to as the Board of Governors, is ultimately responsible for the school, including providing the headteacher and leadership team with scrutiny and challenge, whilst setting the strategic direction of the school.

Parent Council.³⁷ Parent Councils were established under the Parental Involvement Act 2006 in recognition of the important role that parents can play, both in their own children's learning, and in the wider life of a school.³⁸

Under the 2006 legislation the role of the Parent Council is to:

- Support the school in its work with pupils.
- Represent the views of all parents and carers.
- Encourage links between the school, parents, carers, pupils and the wider community.³⁹

The Act gives a Parent Council powers to gather views from the Parent Forum and provide information and views to schools and education authorities on matters which affect children's education and the life and work of the school. In all cases, parents and the Parent Council can expect to influence decisions, to be listened to, and be engaged in ongoing effective two-way communication with schools and school leaders. The Parent Council is fully involved in key decision-making processes and receives useful feedback as to how their views are being taken forward or addressed.

The leverage of parent councils in Scotland is illustrated by a recent example where a collective from all 17 Aberdeenshire secondary schools demanded action from the Scottish Government on the lack of teachers in the region. The group claimed that the Teacher Induction Scheme, designed to encourage newly-qualified teachers to take up posts in areas such as Aberdeenshire, was not fit for purpose. They met with the Cabinet Secretary for Education and pressed for more teachers. The Chair of Fraserburgh Academy Parent Council argued that head teachers had stopped advertising some posts and had altered the curriculum by removing computer studies and home economics, relying on Further Education colleges to bridge the gap in provision. In response, the

³⁷ [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

³⁸ There are no set rules about the size of a Parent Council and it is up to the parents to decide how large/small the Parent Council should be.

³⁹ [Scottish Schools \(Parental Involvement\) Act 2006 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Scottish Government provided £145.5m towards a ‘preference waiver payment’ for probationer teachers, as an incentive, to opt for posts in Scotland.⁴⁰

7.3 Wales

In Wales all state schools are local authority-maintained schools, including community schools, foundation schools, voluntary maintained schools and voluntary aided schools. The main types of governor are: parent, teacher, staff, local education authority, community, and foundation (for example religious representation). The numbers of each type of governor on a governing body will differ depending on the type and size of the school.

The Welsh Government advises that the purpose of governance is to help provide the best possible education for learners and assigns three core duties to school governing boards:

1. Providing a strategic view – setting the framework within which the Head and staff run the school; setting the aims and objectives; agreeing policies, targets and priorities for achieving these objectives; monitoring and evaluating.
2. Acting as a critical friend – providing support and challenge to the headteacher and staff, seeking information and clarification.
3. Ensuring accountability – explaining the decisions and actions of the governing body to anyone who has a legitimate interest.

The Welsh Government have various mechanisms for representing parental voice in education policy (parent-teacher associations, school governing bodies, consultations and survey/feedback mechanisms. A recent example is that the government commissioned research amongst parents and carers to understand reasons for pupil absence in schools in Wales. The research highlighted a range of barriers that influenced their child attending school, with just over half of the respondents citing illness as a key factor, one in three that their child

⁴⁰ The Press and Journal. Aberdeenshire teacher shortages: parents demand urgent action amidst fears over future of key subjects. Calum Petrie (8th August 2024).

refuses to go to school and, one in five citing unmet needs. As a result of this evidence from parents the Welsh Government set up a National Attendance taskforce to provide strategic direction, set priorities and identify further tangible actions to drive improvements in attendance and re-engage learners.⁴¹ School governors play a key role in promoting good attendance by reviewing attendance data, challenging the data and attendance management practices to reduce absenteeism, and promoting an inclusive school environment with a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and discrimination.

7.4 Republic of Ireland

The governance structure of schools in the Republic of Ireland is such that, in accordance with the Education Act 1998, all schools have a patron which sets the ethos for the school. Schools have a board of management appointed by the patron to manage the school. The patron is the body that establishes and operates the school and is responsible for the school's characteristic spirit and ethos. The patron of a school does not have a direct role in the governance of the school which in most cases is a matter for the Board of Management. The functions of a board of management are set out in the Education Act 1998. In general, all schools have the same management structure. That is, they have a patron, board of management and a principal teacher. While the Minister for Education sets the policy direction for schools, responsibility for the school is vested in the school patron or trustee. The patron delegates responsibility for the running of the school to the board of management. The school's board of management communicates with parents and guardians and teachers to ensure the smooth running of the school for the benefit of the children in the school.⁴²

The Board of Management is responsible for the governance and direction of the school, the use of school resources and the management of budgetary allocations made to the school by the Minister. To discharge its duty in this regard, the Board should ensure that there is an adequate system of control,

⁴¹ [Understanding Pupil Absence in Wales](#)

⁴² [Department of Education: OECD Review of resourcing schools to address disadvantage \(2024\)](#)

delegation and accountability in place for the smooth and efficient operation of school services and school administration. While the Board may delegate many of its responsibilities to the Principal and in some circumstances to sub committees of the Board, it must remain aware of its responsibilities and of its accountability to the Minister.⁴³

Education authorities engaging with parents confers the status of the latter as a stakeholder in their children's education which, in turn, requires the former to be accountable to them. A study on parental involvement, engagement and partnership with primary schools in the Republic of Ireland highlighted that in circumstances where parents were living in poverty or at risk of marginalisation, schools needed to be aware that such parents may underestimate their capacities for supporting their child's learning. This prompted government policy to promote parental involvement and strengthen parents' self-efficacy beliefs with regard to their role in educating their child, and better utilising the skills parents already have.⁴⁴

Additional examples of international good practice illustrative of parental engagement and governors' accountability to them are set out in Appendix 2.

8 Parents' Voices in the UK

Parent governors are an important part of BoGs and bring experience of having a child at the school. How boards engage with parents will be different from school to school. Even though Boards of Governors have parental representation and may, at the individual school level, exercise accountability, the collective voice of parents is largely missing in holding education authorities to account. An insight into the issues raised by parents in Northern Ireland is captured by a UK survey conducted by Parentkind, a national charity which represents parents' views on their child's learning. Parentkind is a network of

⁴³ [Governance Manual for Community and Comprehensive Schools: Department of Education and Skills](#)

⁴⁴ [Parental involvement, Engagement and Partnership](#)

12,800 Parent Teacher Associations across the UK. In April/May 2024 Parentkind conducted a UK-wide survey of 5,490 parents across the UK who had at least one child aged four to 18 in school, including 303 parents in Northern Ireland.⁴⁵ The figures were weighted and are representative of all UK parents aged 18+.⁴⁶

The results showed some significant differences in parents' views across the UK⁴⁷:

Northern Ireland:

- Most likely to say homework is a cause of arguments.
- Most likely to be concerned about costs of school uniforms, materials for classes, voluntary donations and after-school clubs.
- Child most likely to be negatively influenced by people on social media.

Scotland:

- Least likely to say child's school takes attendance seriously.
- Least likely to struggle with school costs.

Wales:

- Most likely to say they are unhappy (as parents) most of the time.
- Least likely to be happy with the quality of education their child receives.
- Most likely to consider child missing school for a holiday.

Parentkind suggested a number of recommendations ("a call to action for the Northern Ireland Executive and politicians across Northern Ireland") in response to the evidence collected from parents in Northern Ireland.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ [National Parent Survey 2024 Parentkind](#)

⁴⁶ Given the sample size for Northern Ireland there is a margin of error of +/- 5.6% in extrapolating to the general population of parents.

⁴⁷ Views from English parents are disaggregated across regions (e.g. West Midlands, Yorkshire & the Humber, London etc.) and are not reported here.

⁴⁸ [The National Parent Survey for Northern Ireland 2024](#)

To strengthen accountability of education providers to parents and their children, they recommended, inter alia, the following (see box below):

1. A Government that listens to parents:

- There should be consultation with parents ahead of major policy announcements.
- The Education and Training Inspectorate should conduct an annual assessment of parent opinions as a way of understanding how happy they are with the education their child is receiving.

2. The cost-of-living crisis and helping parents in poverty:

- Many parents are struggling with the cost of living. Schools trips and family days impose a huge burden on the poorest parents with overstretched budgets. Funding to support parents for school trips with educational value would help those families significantly.
- Support new Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) in the poorest areas to boost enrichment and help with parental costs (uniforms and school trips). This could be done through match funding to support new PTAs in the poorest areas to raise funding for essential items.

3. Crack down on social media and smartphones:

- Ban smartphones for children in Northern Ireland following a review of the evidence on the impact of smartphones and social media on children. The review should provide the basis for new measures to introduce a social media age of consent at age 16, restrictions on the marketing of smartphones to children under 16, and a total ban on smartphones in schools in Northern Ireland.

4. After-school clubs:

- Every primary and post-primary child should have access to weekly extra-curricular activities and after-school clubs. The survey evidence shows that too few children are taking part in after-school clubs and activities, preferably with additional funding to schools to support this work.

5. Help parents to support their learning:

- Develop a nationally recognised 'kitemark' for engaging with parents (see Appendix 3). The kitemark is a resource which helps school leaders to maximise parents' interest in their children's learning and create successful home-school partnerships.
- Rethink homework. Almost half of the parents in the survey said that homework is causing rows and argument at home. Parents and children are feeling more pressure than ever. This should prompt a national conversation and review of homework that encourages children to enjoy learning again and find time for clubs outside of school.

9 Conclusions

The aim of this research paper was to consider the types of accountabilities which school governors perform and the extent to which the current system prioritises accountability to parents.

The findings show that governors shoulder a heavy responsibility in their voluntary role of holding the head teacher to account for the day-to-day running of the school; school leadership for improving pupil and staff performance; and accountability for financial performance.

Rather surprisingly, given this weighty responsibility, training for governors is voluntary or as the EA put it ‘governors are expected to undertake training to enable them to fulfil their role’.

Existing research shows that governors tended to be ‘inward facing’ in terms of accountability. In other words, their focus is on the financial position of the school rather than external accountability to parents and carers of children. This is hardly surprising given the difficult financial circumstances in which many schools now find themselves.

The paper considered the role which the Department of Education, with independent advice from ETI, has in relation to Boards of Governors and the accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that schools provide a high standard of education for all children. Although DE has a range of statutory powers to enforce standards, it tries to work collaboratively through Managing Authorities to resolve governance issues respecting the principle of local management of schools

Participation by parents in the school system therefore tends to be reactive rather than proactive. If they are concerned about their child, they can follow the internal complaints procedure. If the process is unsatisfactorily exhausted, then they have recourse to the Ombudsman. The system of parental involvement is therefore responsive rather than participative.

There are examples from other regions of the UK and internationally which offer models of engagement between parents and the school, a partnership of the key stakeholders, and demonstrate how parental voice can influence education policies. There is also some current survey evidence in Northern Ireland that allows policy makers to gauge the concerns of parents directly.

Parents have a limited voice exercised through representation on BoGs. Schools could benefit significantly from reaching out to parents as a key stakeholder in the children learning and teaching journey. One such framework for home-school partnerships is set out in Appendix 3.

10 Appendix 1: Membership of BoGs

Membership of school Board of Governors by governor category

In accordance with the provisions of the Education and Libraries (NI) Order 1986, amended by the Education (NI) Order 1997, the composition of Board of Governors is shown in the table below, (the principal and co-opted governors are additional to the membership).⁴⁹

Membership of School Boards of Governors by Governor Category⁵⁰

Controlled Schools in public ownership	Number of Governors on the Board	Foundation Governors	EA Governors	DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary	9	4	2	0	2	1
	16	6	4	0	4	2

⁴⁹ ‘Every School a Good School’: The Governors’ Role, A Guide for Governors (2023)

⁵⁰ The Principal and Co-Opted Governors are additional to the membership shown above.

	24	9	6	0	6	3
Nursery, Grammar & Special	8	0	3	2	2	1
	16	0	6	4	4	2
	24	0	9	6	6	3
Integrated Nursery, Primary & Secondary ⁵¹	14	2 Transferors	4	0	4	2
		2 Trustees				
	21	3 Transferors	6	0	6	3
		3 Trustees				
	14	0	4	4	4	2

Integrated Grammar or other integrated school ⁵²	21	0	6	6	6	3
Schools in private Ownership	Number of Governors on the Board	Foundation Governors	EA Governors	DE Governors	Parent Governors	Teacher Governors
Primary & Secondary (voluntary Maintained 100% capital grant)	9	4*	2	1	1	1
	18	8*	4	2	2	2
	27	12*	6	3	3	3
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees.					
	10	6*	2	0	1	1

⁵² Applies to a school which prior to transformation was a voluntary school other than a catholic maintained school.

Primary & Secondary (voluntary maintained 85% capital grant)	18	10*	4	0	2	2
	27	15*	6	0	3	3
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees.					
Primary & Secondary (Grant Maintained Integrated)	16	6	0	4	4	2
	24	9	0	6	6	3
Voluntary Grammar (100% capital grant)	9	4*	0	3	1	1
	18	8*	0	6	2	2
	27	12*	0	9	3	3
	36	16*	0	12	4	4
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees.					

Voluntary Grammar (85% capital grant)	10	6	0	2	1	1
	18	10	0	4	2	2
	27	15	0	6	3	3
	36	20	0	8	4	4
	*Trustee governors must include at least 1 parent in their nominees.					
Voluntary Grammar (no capital grant)	13 or fewer	No set No.*	0	0	1	1
	14 or more	No set No.*	0	0	2	2
	*but must include at least 1 parent in their nominees.					

11 Appendix 2: Some International Examples

We consider examples of countries where parental inputs and engagement have been influential in the education of their children. This influence can come in the form of BoGs and/or external parental leverage or advocacy groups, demonstrating their impact on school policies.

11.1 Finland

Finland's education system is highly decentralised, and each school has a school board that includes parents. The boards are responsible for decisions on local matters such as curriculum adjustments, school development, and resource allocation. In some municipalities, parent representatives have effectively questioned education authorities on curriculum reforms, pushing for more inclusion of special needs students and better use of technology in the classroom. Local boards have the authority to influence policy decisions such as special needs education made at the school and municipal level. For example, teachers strive to keep all their children in one group. In a traditional setting, a special education teacher might take some children to a 'special education' class for a period of time, thereby separating them from the rest of the group. In an inclusive Finnish classroom, on the other hand, teachers provide more hands-on support for the children who need it while they participate in group activities.⁵³ Local boards, with significant parental involvement, have therefore been key to education policy change in how special needs education is provided in the Finnish schools' system.

11.2 United States

In the U.S., parent involvement in school governance varies by state and district. In many districts, parents are elected to school boards or advisory councils, where they have the power to influence school policies and hold district authorities accountable. In the New York City Department of Education,

⁵³ [Finland's approach to Special Needs and Inclusion.](#)

parent members of Community Education Councils (CECs) regularly challenge the Department of Education on decisions like school rezoning (redrawing the boundaries for schools districts) and budget allocations. Parents in the CEC of District 15 in Brooklyn successfully pushed for changes to the admissions process, ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources among schools in the district.⁵⁴ In the Los Angeles Unified School District, parent advocacy through school boards has led to the successful implementation of policies on class sizes, funding for underserved schools, and equitable access to quality teaching.⁵⁵

11.3 Australia

In Australia, parent involvement in school governance is often facilitated through School Councils, particularly in public schools. Parents play a crucial role in decision-making on school budgets, policies, and curriculum development. Victoria State has a specific parent engagement policy. To comply with this standard, at minimum, schools must: make sure families participate in child safety and wellbeing decisions which affect their child; engage and openly communicate with families and the school community about its child safe approach; make child safety information accessible; involve families and the school community in developing and reviewing child safety and wellbeing policies and practices; and, inform families and carers about the school's governance and approach to child safety and wellbeing, including roles and responsibilities of school staff.⁵⁶

Parent representatives have been instrumental in holding school leadership to account for student welfare policies, particularly during the rollout of the state's mental health and well-being programmes in schools. Parent governors worked with education authorities to ensure that programmes were tailored to the needs of their children and had measurable outcomes.

⁵⁴ [District 15 Diversity Plan Evaluation and Reflection](#)

⁵⁵ [Los Angeles Unified School District: Local control and accountability plan](#)

⁵⁶ [Schools Family Engagement Guidance \(Victoria\)](#)

11.4 Sweden

Sweden has a democratic approach to school governance, where parents are represented in local school boards and committees. These boards oversee school policies and the distribution of resources, allowing parents to challenge education authorities on both operational and pedagogical issues. In some Swedish municipalities, parent representatives have effectively held education authorities to account for failing to provide adequate support for children with learning disabilities. This pressure has led to more inclusive education policies and improved access to special education services.⁵⁷

Summarising these international examples, parents and parent governors actively participate in school governance, ensuring that the concerns of the community are reflected in decision-making processes. They hold education authorities accountable by scrutinising budgets, questioning academic policies, and advocating for equal opportunities in education. In short, parent voices are an important influence in how schools deliver learning and teaching to children and young people.

⁵⁷ [Sweden: systems of support and specialist provision](#)

12 Appendix 3: Parent-Friendly Schools

Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools⁵⁸

Parentkind has developed a Blueprint for Parent resource which helps school leaders to maximise parents' interest in their children's learning and create successful home-school partnerships. The blueprint is built on five key drivers as follows (see box below):

- 1. Leadership, Ethos and Resources:** leadership at a school determines how effectively actions will be taken to improve parental participation as well as being key to creating the conditions in which parent participation can thrive. In general, head teachers or members of the senior leadership team are, and should be, in charge of parental engagement in their schools.
- 2. Effective Two-Way Communication:** building a relationship of trust between school and community, parents and teachers is vital, especially if there are likely to be some potentially challenging conversations further down the line. If schools can allay anxieties and parents feel able to open up about important factors that may affect children's learning and behaviour in school, then both sides can focus their conversations on working together to support the child.
- 3. Supporting Learning at Home:** parents want to support their child, and where teachers can tap into this motivation and highlight things for parents to do, it can supercharge a child's education and raise levels of achievement. When parents share a positive attitude towards learning and school, they create a home

⁵⁸ [Parentkind Blueprint for Parent-Friendly Schools.](#)

learning environment that has a positive impact on children's attainment and that complements the work of schools.

4. Involvement in school life: parental involvement in schools relates to the extent to which parents play a role in volunteering in school life. Getting parents involved builds trust and lays the foundations for positive longer-term collaborations.

5. Community Engagement: It is important for schools engage with the wider parent communities outside the school gates. Parent communities are made up of many cultures that can enrich the school but this diversity can also present barriers and inequalities to participation. Schools can work with their local communities to draw on specialist knowledge, skills and resources in mutually beneficial ways and to respond to a wide range of parents' and children's educational, social, health and wellbeing needs.