

Enhancing inclusivity

# Browne Jacobson and National Governance Association unites to address the diversity deficit in school governance

13 February 2025  Victoria Hatton

Browne Jacobson has partnered with the National Governance Association (NGA) to address the critical lack of diversity in school governing boards. Victoria Hatton, Senior Associate at Browne Jacobson, and Rani Kaur, Head of Advice at the NGA, explain the rationale behind this collaboration.

Diversity on school governing boards is crucial. It allows students to see themselves reflected in their leaders, which is vital for their aspirations.

It ensures decisions are perceived as being made with their best interests at heart.

For parents and staff, seeing a diverse board helps to reinforce that its actions are considerate of varied perspectives.

And for headteachers and governors, diversity brings new thinking to the delivery of education, helping to avoid “groupthink” and challenging conventional processes to enable continuous improvement.

Yet the [NGA's Annual Governance Survey](#) has consistently highlighted a diversity deficit in school governing boards across England, with under-representation in age, race, religion and sex.

This gap not only affects the decision-making process, but also impacts the relatability of these boards to the diverse student populations they govern and the wider communities they represent.

## Browne Jacobson and NGA joint initiative

Browne Jacobson and the NGA's collaboration aims to inject new ideas into school governance so that diversity takes a more central role in the building of governing boards.

This joint initiative, launched on National School Governors' Awareness Day, leverages our combined strengths and networks.

The NGA brings a well-established campaign focused on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), while Browne Jacobson's longstanding commitment to DEI and social mobility – cemented by its [joint-top ranking in the Social Mobility Employer Index for 2024](#), as well as [award-winning FAIRE and REACH mentoring programmes](#) – is enhanced by its national reach and strategic connections.

The primary aims of this initiative are to diversify the pool of school and academy governors so these bodies better represent broader society, and to enhance awareness and understanding of the school governor role, highlighting its importance and impact on successful educational outcomes.

This collaboration also encourages employers to support their employees in taking up governor roles. Serving as a governor not only contributes to the community but also enhances personal and professional skills such as leadership, management and financial accountability.

# Takeaways for schools and governing boards

As professionals working in the education sector and school governors in our spare time, we have identified a number of key themes and practical steps through our own experiences and conversations with school leaders who have embraced DEI in school governance.

These include:

- Diversity encompasses more than physical characteristics – it includes diversity of thoughts and experiences. It's about how these diverse perspectives can contribute meaningfully to a governing board's decision-making process.
- Diversity can be advantageous to a school's decision-making processes, image and recruitment prospects.
- Schools should utilise multiple avenues for recruitment, such as local employers, professional networks and the diverse parent cohort of the school. It's also about looking sector-wide, not just within one's own school, to enhance diversity across the board.
- Boards should start by conducting a diversity audit to identify gaps. It's important to address these gaps not just for the sake of diversity, but to enrich the board's skill set and perspectives, which directly benefits the school's governance. NGA has developed a [governing board diversity indicators form](#).
- Employers should highlight the professional development benefits that governance roles offer, such as budget management and leadership skills. Supporting employees in these roles can lead to significant professional growth and organisational benefits.
- Raising the profile of governance roles and ensuring logistical support like time off for school visits are crucial. Employers can also facilitate network groups to share best practices and experiences.
- Research and reach out to local schools to speak with current governors. Understanding the role and its impact can demystify governance and highlight its benefits and suitability.

While progress is being made, continuous effort is needed to enhance diversity in school governance. A diverse board sets a vision that permeates the entire school, fostering an inclusive environment that benefits everyone within the school community.

## Contents

<a href="#">Addressing the diversity deficit in school governance: A call to action</a>	→
<a href="#">School governance: Driving change through diverse leadership</a>	→
<a href="#">DEI in school governance: Interview with Chiltern Learning Trust leadership</a>	→
<a href="#">Reflecting our communities: The push for diversity in school governance</a>	→
<a href="#">DEI in school governance: Key themes and insights</a>	→

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