



# The local tier of governance in School Trusts

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CST's position is that the local tier of governance is absolutely essential to effective governance of a complex organisation in a multi-academy trust.

While trusts have different approaches to the local tier of governance, it is essential that trusts are clear about what functions of governance are delegated. In some cases, the local tier of governance holds no formal governance functions and is advisory only.

In CST's view, the local tier of governance is essential for the following reasons:

- Local governors are the Trust's ambassadors in the local community and indeed hold deep knowledge of the community and their specific needs. This knowledge and understanding is essential to the Trust Board.
- Local governors can play a very important role in relation to safeguarding and safety as they know their schools intimately and will have a much closer involvement in many cases in the school than the trust board.
- Local governors can play a very important role in the scrutiny of education quality and performance. This is particularly important in the context of Ofsted inspections. Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework 2019 assesses whether "those responsible for governance understand their role and carry this out effectively. They ensure that the provider has a clear vision and strategy and that resources are managed well. They hold leaders to account for the quality of education or training. Inspectors will always seek to meet those responsible for governance during the inspection."

There are a range of names for local school committees. CST's guidance is that the naming of this tier of governance should reflect the functions which are delegated:

- **Local advisory committees or councils** – no delegated governance functions or powers– the advisory committee is tasked with meaningful engagement with parents and local communities;
- **Local school committees** – limited delegated governance functions (but no powers) for example scrutiny of standards, health and safety and safeguarding, and community engagement;



- **Local governing boards** – a fuller set of delegated functions and some powers, which may include some decisions over school level finance.

On balance, it is probably not helpful to use the language of a governing board if no governance powers are delegated to local level. A trust board may use wholly advisory bodies at local level to engage meaningfully with parents and local communities to understand their views and needs and listen to their feedback.

The Governance Handbook makes clear that even where local school committees are wholly advisory in nature, **they are a full and formal part of the governance structure**, as determined by the Articles of Association. The DfE expects the trust board (or any committee established by the trust board to exercise the governance functions on its behalf) to have very close links with the advisory committee and actively take into account and respond to the issue and risks it identifies and escalates.

CST advises that it is useful to talk about **the Governance Community** to refer to the entire governance structure.

CST also advises that the local tier of governance and the delegations to them are kept under review as the Trust grows.

There should be a continuous feedback loop between the trust board and local tier of governance so that the trust board has oversight of the effectiveness of the local tier of governance. CST's advice is that there should be strong sense of a single governance community with a shared sense of mission, vision, values and culture, a shared sense of purpose and the execution of the strategy set by the trust board.

CST's advice is that trust boards should exercise oversight of the work of their committees and should be able assess the relative strengths of each local school committee. This is particularly important where a trust board delegates the governance functions of the scrutiny of educational performance and/or finances.



The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) is the national organisation and sector body for School Trusts in England advocating for, connecting and supporting executive and governance leaders. We are a membership organisation of organisations. This means that the organisation – the Trust – is the member. Our mission is to build an excellent education system in England – every school part of a strong and sustainable group in which every child is a powerful learner and adults learn and develop together as teachers and leaders.

Tel: 0115 917 0142

Email: [admin@cstuk.org.uk](mailto:admin@cstuk.org.uk)

Address: Suite 10, Whiteley Mill

Offices, 39 Nottingham Road,

Stapleford, NG9 8AD



[@CSTvoice](https://twitter.com/CSTvoice)

[cstuk.org.uk](http://cstuk.org.uk)

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