The Great Big Governance Glossary: Supporting the Autumn Term Agenda

SBW

Governance

Dear New Governor,

Welcome to governance! You may have been given some documents for your first meeting already and one may be a link to or a copy of the **Great Big Governance Glossary**: (all 165 pages of it!). This note will help you navigate both documents together, so you can prepare effectively for your first meeting.

Before you start to feel too overwhelmed by the agenda which itself can run to 3 or 4 pages why not think of it as your roadmap for the meeting, and the Glossary as your sat-nav explaining what each landmark means. Thank you to AI for that metaphor!

The most important thing to remember is that all agendas contain the same type of items to discuss but the one you have in front of you may not be in the same order as the example I've used.

How to Use This Guide

For each agenda item below, I've listed:

- What the agenda item is about
- Which Glossary entries will help you understand it
- Key questions you might want to ask (from the Glossary)
- Page numbers so you can find the relevant sections quickly

Agenda Item by Agenda Item Breakdown

Item 1: Welcome, Apologies, Declarations & Interests

What's happening: The meeting starts with housekeeping – checking who's here, who's absent, and whether anyone has a conflict of interest.

Glossary entries:

- **A is for Apologies** (p.19) – why sending apologies matters
- **C is for Conflicts and Declarations of Interest** (p.47-48) – what you need to declare
- **Q is for Quorate** (p.133-134) – why having enough people matters
- **C is for Confidentiality** (p.47) – what you can and can't share

What you need to do:

- If you can't attend a meeting, send apologies to the clerk
- Declare any business or financial interests you have
- Remember: everything discussed is confidential unless stated otherwise

Item 2: Governance & Statutory Compliance

What's happening: The board checks that all governors have completed required training, declarations, and that governance records are up to date.

Glossary entries:

- **T is for Training and CPD** (p.148) – why training matters
- **S is for Safeguarding (p.140-141)** – your safeguarding responsibilities
- **K is for KCSIE (p.100-101) –** the safeguarding guidance you must read
- **C is for Code of Conduct (p.41-42)** – the Nolan Principles

- **G is for Get Information About Schools (GIAS) (p.76) –** where your details are published

Item 3: Chair/Vice-Chair & Governor Roles

What's happening: The board elects its chair and vice chair, and appoints link governors for key areas like safeguarding and SEND. This usually takes place once a year but not always in the autumn term.

Glossary entries:

- **C is for Chair** (p.37) – what the chair does
- **V is for Vice Chair** (p.154) – the vice chair's role
- **L is for Link Governor** (p.105-106) – what link governors do
- **S is for Safeguarding** (p.140-141) – why the safeguarding link is essential
- **D is for Distributed Leadership** (p.59) – sharing the workload

Item 4: Minutes & Matters Arising

What's happening: The board approves the minutes from the last meeting and checks that actions have been completed.

Glossary entries:

- **M is for Minutes** (p.114) – why minutes matter
- **A is for Action and Action** Log (p.16-17) – tracking what needs to be done

Item 5: Safeguarding Compliance & Update

What's happening: The most important item on the agenda. The board checks that safeguarding arrangements are robust and that all children are safe.

Glossary entries to read:

- **S is for Safeguarding (p.140-141)** – your responsibilities
- **K is for KCSIE (p.100-101)** – the statutory guidance
- **S is for Single Central Record (p.144)** – the register of staff checks
- **L is for Looked After Children (LAC)** (p.106-108) – supporting vulnerable pupils

Item 6: Vision Statement Review

What's happening: The board reviews whether the school's vision and values are still relevant and driving decisions.

Glossary entries:

- **V is for Vision and Values (p.154-155) –** why vision matters
- **E is for Ethos (p.67) –** living your values
- **C is for Culture (p.51-52) –** what the school feels like

Item 7: School Development Plan, Headteacher's Report & Quality of Education

Under this item there could be a wide range of reports but the main ones are the school or academy development plan, the Headteacher's report (which includes a whole suite of data on outcomes from the last academic year). This is one of the main elements of the meeting and is about seeking assurance (p.22) around the second core function of governance (p.9).

What's happening: The board reviews progress against the school's improvement priorities and checks that the curriculum is having an impact.

Glossary entries:

- **A is for Assurance** (p.22) – how boards gain confidence that systems are working
- **H is for Headteacher's Report** (and CEO Report) (p.83-86) – what to expect from leadership reports and how to read them strategically
- **I is for Inclusion** (p.91-97) – understanding the SEND reforms, the Schools White Paper 2026, and your responsibilities for ensuring every child is included
- **D is for Data** (p.54-55) – understanding school data
- **C is for Curriculum** (p.53-54) – what the school teaches
- **O is for Outcomes** (p.122) – what matters most
- **H is for "How do we know?"** (p.13) – the most important question

Key questions:

1. What are the school's current strengths and areas for development?
2. Is the Headteacher's Report clear, evidence-based, evaluative, and focused on priorities and risks? Does it help us ask the right questions?
3. How are we preparing for the SEND reforms and the new Ofsted Inclusion grade? What does inclusion look like in practice in our school?
4. How do we know our curriculum is having the intended impact on all pupils, including those with SEND and disadvantaged pupils?

Item 8: Pupils – Attendance, SEND, PP & Wellbeing

What's happening: The board checks that vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils are making progress and that barriers are being removed.

Glossary entries:

- **A is for Attendance (p.23-25) –** why attendance matters
- **P is for Persistent Absence (p.125-126) –** pupils missing 10%+ of school
- **P is for Pupil Premium (p.131-132) –** funding for disadvantaged pupils
- **I is for Inclusion (p.92-97)** – ensuring every child is included
- **S is for Special Schools/SEND** (p.145) – supporting pupils with SEND

Key questions

1. What is current attendance for priority pupils compared to this time last year?
2. How are we measuring the impact of our Pupil Premium spending on closing gaps?

Item 9: Staff Wellbeing & Workload

What's happening: The board checks that staff are supported and that workload is manageable.

Glossary entries:

- **W is for Wellbeing and Mental Health** (p.158) – why wellbeing matters
- **W is for Workload** (p.159) – managing staff workload

Key questions from the Glossary:

1. What actions have leaders taken in response to staff feedback?

2. Are there any workload pressures that governors can help alleviate?

Item 10: Governor Skills Audit, Training & Monitoring Visits

What's happening: The board checks it has the right skills and plans governor visits to the school.

Glossary entries:

- **S is for Skills and Knowledge Audits (p.144) –** identifying gaps and undertaking training
- **T is for Training and CPD (p.148) –** developing your skill and confidence as a governor
- **V is for Visits (p.156**-157) – how to visit school safely and effectively

Key questions from the Glossary:

1. What skills gaps exist on our LGB, and how will we address them?
2. Have we scheduled monitoring visits that align with our strategic priorities?

Item 11: Finance, Risk, H&S & Cyber/Data Compliance

What's happening: The board reviews the budget position, checks that risks are being managed effectively, and ensures that health and safety and cyber security arrangements are robust.

Glossary entries:

- **F is for Finance** (p.70-72) – understanding budgets, your strategic role. Note there may be a difference between maintained schools and academies as some local layer governors do not have finance oversight
- **R is for Risk** (p.139) – understanding risk and the risk register
- **H is for Health and Safety** (p.87-88) – your responsibilities
- **P is for Phishing** (p.126-127) – cyber security threats
- A is for Assurance (p.22) – seeking confidence that systems and controls are working

Key questions from the Glossary:

1. How does our spending align with our strategic priorities? (Finance)
2. What are the financial risks facing the school, and how are we mitigating them? (Finance)
3. What are our highest-rated risks, and are mitigation actions effective? (Risk)
4. How confident are we in our cyber security measures? (Cyber/Data)
5. Do we have a health and safety policy, and when was our last H&S audit? (H&S)
6. Are we getting value for money? (Finance)

Item 12: Policies and Statutory Submissions

What's happening: The board approves policies and checks that statutory requirements are being met.

Glossary entries:

- **P is for Policy** (p.127-128) – what policies you need
- **W is for Website** (p.157) – what must be published online

Key questions from the Glossary:

1. Have all required policies been reviewed within their review cycle?
2. Have all statutory submissions been completed on time?

Item 13: Trust Items (academy trusts only)

What's happening: The board receives updates from the trust and checks it understands its delegated powers.

Glossary entries:

- **S is for Scheme of Delegation (p.141) –** what you can and can't decide
- **L is for Local Governing Body** (p.108-109) – your role in the trust

Key questions from the Glossary:

1. Are we clear on which decisions sit with the LGB and which with the Trust Board?
2. Is the proposed admissions number appropriate for our school's capacity and local demand?

TOP TIPS FOR YOUR FIRST MEETING

- ✓ **Don't try to read the whole Glossary before your first meeting!** Use this guide to focus on the sections that relate to your agenda.
- ✓ **Prepare 2-3 questions in advance** – write them down so you don't forget them.
- ✓ **It's okay to say** "I don't know" or "Can you explain that?" – everyone was new once.
- ✓ **Focus on the big picture** – you're here to think strategically, not get lost in operational detail.
- ✓ Remember **why you're here** – for the children and young people in your school.

Welcome to governance. You've got this.

About SBW Governance

SBW Governance is owned by Fee Stagg, who was a National Leader of Governance until August

2021. Fee has more than 20 years' experience as a governor, trustee, and clerk. She is currently a Chair of Trustees in both the East and West Midlands, and also serves as a local governor and Member in other schools and trusts. Fee works as a Governance Professional across a number of schools, trusts, and Local Governing Boards in the north west and midlands areas. Contact Information fiona@sbwgovernance.co.uk
www.sbwgovernance.co.uk

You can find Fee on LinkedIn here.