

EXTERNAL REVIEW OF GOVERNANCE

Commissioning Document

Commissioning Authority:
NCL Trust Board

Commissioning Officer:
NCL Head of Governance & Compliance

1. Introduction

The Trust Board of Newham Community Learning (NCL) ("hereinafter referred to as the Trust") invites suitably qualified and experienced governance consultants to submit proposals to undertake an independent, comprehensive Governance Review.

The purpose of this review is to evaluate the effectiveness, compliance, and strategic capacity of the Trust's governance arrangements and to provide clear recommendations for improvement.

2. Background

NCL is a family of schools in the west of the London borough of Newham, which exists to provide an excellent education for all young people in our community. Our schools educate children and young people from 2-16 years old, offering access to excellent teaching, pastoral care, and opportunities for personal development across all phases of education.

The education we provide will be:

- **Ambitious:** for our young people, encouraging and supporting them to excel
- **Caring:** where all members of the community treat each other with kindness and respect
- **Inclusive:** meeting the needs and aspirations of all young people
- **Broad-ranging:** giving access to a broad and rich range of experiences to prepare them for an active role in the next stage of their education or life after school

Our agreed principles:

- We support staff at all levels to continue developing and learning, including continuously refreshing their knowledge and skills.
- We manage our resources effectively and transparently for the benefit of our students.
- We listen and respond to the views of our staff, students, families and our local community.
- We are actively committed to diversity, inclusion and equity– no one is left out or left behind.
- We place the highest priority on safeguarding the young people in our care.
- We maintain and value the distinct identity of each school within the Trust.
- We work collaboratively with a wide range of partners, including the local authority, unions and other stakeholders, to achieve the best possible outcomes for our wider community.
- We are a responsible employer, supporting our staff and recognising that the commitment of our staff is fundamental to the success of our schools.

Our teaching is constantly evolving, with staff able to work together to develop their practice, enabling us to offer a broad curriculum across our six schools. At our primary schools, we offer an engaging and challenging curriculum tailored to ensure that every child is able to reach their full potential. This provides a strong grounding from which children are able to move to our secondary schools to continue their education.

Each of our secondaries has a wide range of subjects on offer, so that every student is able to discover and develop their aptitudes and interests. Curricular and co-curricular development across all phases of education is further enhanced through the sharing of our excellent in-school facilities with students attending any of our schools.

Our schools are rooted in, and responsive to, their local communities. We are able to offer secondary education in either single sex or co-educational settings, with our primary settings both offering co-educational settings.

Partnership is key to our operation as a group of schools. As a Trust based solely in Newham, we have strong relationships with our local authority and other local partners, ensuring that we are able to secure the best possible provision for every child and young person attending our schools. While our focus remains local, our outlook is global, with our school curricula designed to reflect the broad range of perspectives that our hugely diverse student body brings.

3. Objectives of the Governance Review

The Governance Review should:

- Assess the effectiveness of the Trust Board, its Committees and local governance arrangements.
- Evaluate compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook, Charity Commission guidance, Companies House requirements, and relevant statutory frameworks.
- Provide an objective analysis of governance culture, behaviours, and decision-making.
- Review strategic oversight of educational performance, safeguarding, financial management, risk, and estates.
- Identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for development.
- Provide actionable and prioritised recommendations supported by evidence.

4. Scope of Work

The scope of the Governance Review must include, but is not limited to, the following areas:

4.1 Governance Efficacy, Structure and Frameworks

- Clarity and suitability of the Trust's governance model including the members of the LGB also being trustees.
- Effectiveness of the Scheme of Delegation.
- Committee structure, terms of reference, and reporting lines.
- Local governance/academy committees' remit, role clarity, and effectiveness.
- Recruitment, retention and succession planning at both Trust and Local Governance levels

4.2 Board Composition, Skills, and Capacity

- Skills audit and analysis of board competency.
- Trustee recruitment, succession planning, and induction processes.

- Diversity, Equity and inclusion considerations.
- Workload, capacity, and attendance.

4.3 Governance Processes and Compliance

- Compliance with the Academy Trust Handbook.
- Annual reporting and statutory submissions.
- Risk management processes and Board oversight.
- Safeguarding governance and statutory requirements.
- Financial oversight, audit and assurance, and scrutiny arrangements.

4.4 Culture, Values, Behaviours, and Decision-Making

- Quality of challenge and support.
- Trust guiding principles
- Trustee relationships with the CEO, senior executive team, and academy leaders.
- Transparency, openness, and ethical governance.
- Communication and information flow (including lines of communication between the Trust Board and Local Governing Boards).

4.5 Board Meetings and Documentation

- Quality and timeliness of board papers, agendas, and minutes.
- Forward planning and strategic prioritisation.
- Use of data and dashboards to inform governance.

4.6 Strategic Impact and Performance Oversight

- Oversight of educational outcomes and school improvement.
- Oversight of financial sustainability, estates, and operations.
- Monitoring of Trust strategy and long-term planning.
- Alignment of governance with organisational vision and values.

4.7 Benchmarking and Best Practice

- Comparison with DfE, NGA, CST and sector best practice.
- Recommendations for governance development, training, and structural improvement.

5. Methodology

The Trust expects bidders to outline a clear methodology, which may include:

- Review of documentation (e.g., minutes, agendas, Scheme of Delegation, policies).
- Interviews with Members, Trustees, CEO/Accounting Officer, Senior Leaders, Chairs of LGBs and Governors (who are also trustees) and any other individual within the governance sphere as determined by the Reviewer.
- Observation of meetings of the Trust Board and Committee meetings.
- Surveys or focus groups of stakeholders.
- Skills audit and governance self-evaluation tools.

Bidders should specify the tools, frameworks, and benchmarks they will use.

6. Deliverables

The successful provider will work to the direction of trustees in collaboration with the CEO as Accounting Officer to deliver:

1. **Initial scoping meeting** and project plan with the Commissioning Officer
2. **Full Governance Review Report** including:
 - Executive summary.
 - Detailed findings mapped against the scope.
 - Evidence-based recommendations (short, medium, long term).
 - Prioritisation matrix and implementation roadmap.
3. **Presentation to the Trust Board** including Q&A.
4. **Optional** follow-up support for implementation (to be costed separately).

7. Timescales

7.1 Tender Process

The tendering process will follow the stated timescales, to include:

- **Tender issued:** Tues 06 May 2026
- **Deadline for bidder questions:** Wed 13 May 2026
- **Responses to questions published to all parties:** Fri 15 May 2026
- **Tender submission deadline:** Tues 19 May 2026
- **Shortlisting completed by:** Thurs 21 May 2026
- **Interviews with shortlisted bidders:** Potential dates for interviews will be communicated to shortlisted bidders
- **Contract award:** no more than 3 days after interviews
- **Project start date:** Project start date will be agreed with the winning bidder.

7.2 Governance Review Completion

The Trust anticipates the Governance Review to be completed within ***8–10 weeks** from project commencement. The proposed schedule is:

- **Week 1–2:** Scoping, documentation review, and project planning.
- **Week 3–6:** Interviews, meeting observations, surveys.
- **Week 7:** Analysis and drafting of report.
- **Week 8:** Presentation of findings to the Board.

**with working acknowledgement of scheduled term dates*

8. Supplier Requirements

Bidders must demonstrate:

- Extensive experience of governance reviews in the education sector, preferably multi-academy trusts.



- Understanding of DfE governance expectations.
- Proven methodology and track record of impactful recommendations.
- Strong analytical, communication, and stakeholder engagement skills.
- Independence from all parties to the review, including trustees, senior leaders, and any legal advisers currently engaged by the Trust.
- Impartiality, and adherence to confidentiality requirements

9. Budget and Pricing

Bidders should provide:

- A fully itemised cost proposal with day rates and expenses.
- Separate costings for optional post-review support.
- All prices must be quoted exclusive of VAT.

10. Submission Requirements

Proposals should include:

- Executive summary.
- Understanding of the brief.
- Methodology and timeline.
- Experience and case studies.
- CVs of reviewers.
- Detailed pricing.
- References from similar projects.

11. Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated on:

- **Understanding of requirements** (20%)
- **Quality of methodology and approach** (30%)
- **Relevant experience and expertise** (35%)
- **Value for money** (10%)
- **Quality of presentation/interview** (5%)

12. Terms and Conditions

Include:

- Confidentiality agreements.
- Data protection and GDPR compliance.
- Conflicts of interest statement.
- Contractual terms for payment, cancellation, and variations.

Rationale:

- Given the complexity and sensitivity of the governance context, we need to be confident in the quality and independence of the Reviewer.

13. Contact Details

All enquiries and submissions should be directed to the Commissioning Officer:

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Role: **Head of Governance & Compliance, NCL**

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