A JOINT UNDERSTANDING OF GOOD GOVERNANCE

The Independent Schools Council (ISC) and its constituent Associations (AGBIS, COBIS, GSA, HMC, IAPS, ISA, ISBA and the Society of Heads) recognise the importance of effective governance based on best practice within member schools and have drawn up this Joint Understanding of Good Governance. The independent education sector has a justifiable reputation for excellence and the responsibility for governance of the highest standard rests with each independent school’s legally-defined “proprietor”, be it an individual or individuals, a corporate governing body or trust, or a company. The proprietor is the person or body responsible for the management of the school. The National Governance Steering Group has published a Code¹ which sets out six key principles of good governance with the purpose of assisting those with responsibility for governance to enhance their decision making, increase their accountability and enable them to provide strong leadership. While referring to the “board”, the following key principles, adapted from the Code, are equally valid for all forms of governance in operation in Association schools.

An effective board (or equivalent) will provide good governance and leadership by:

1 **Understanding their role and responsibilities collectively and individually in relation to:**
   - their legal duties
   - the stewardship of assets
   - the provisions of the governing document (where applicable)
   - the external environment
   - the nature of the school

   and in terms of:
   - in conjunction with the Head, setting and safeguarding the vision, values and reputation of the school
   - recognising and adhering to the appropriate boundaries between governance and management of the school
   - overseeing the work of the school
   - supporting staff, in particular the Head and Bursar, including performance management of the Head and Bursar
   - ensuring the education, welfare and safety of pupils

2 **Ensuring delivery of the school’s purpose by:**
   - ensuring that its aims (the charitable objects where applicable) remain relevant and valid
   - in conjunction with the Head, developing a long-term strategy: agreeing the school development plan, operational plans and budgets; monitoring progress and evaluating results; and reviewing and/or amending plans and budgets as appropriate

¹ Good Governance: A Code for the Voluntary and Community Sector, second edition 2010 (www.governancecode.org)
3 Working effectively both as individuals and as a team. The board will have a range of appropriate policies and procedures which will include:

- a clear process for succession planning
- finding and recruiting new board members to meet the school’s changing needs in relation to skills, experience and diversity
- providing suitable induction for new board members
- providing all board members with opportunities for training and development according to their needs
- and periodically reviewing their performance both as individuals and as a team

4 Exercising effective control as an accountable body by ensuring that:

- the school understands and complies with all legal and regulatory requirements
- the school maintains good internal financial management controls
- the board regularly reviews and identifies the major risks to which the organisation is exposed and puts in place systems to manage those risks
- delegation to sub-committees and staff works properly and that this delegated authority is properly supervised

5 Behaving with integrity by:

- paying due regard to the Nolan principles of public life
- safeguarding and promoting the school’s reputation
- acting according to high ethical standards
- identifying and managing conflicts of interest and loyalty
- maintaining independence of decision making
- and delivering impact that best meets the needs of the school (and the charity’s objects where applicable)

6 Being open and accountable through:

- open communications, informing people about the school and its work
- appropriate consultation on significant changes to the school’s operation or policies
- listening and responding to the views of all stakeholders with an interest in the school’s work
- handling complaints constructively, impartially and effectively
- and considering the school’s responsibility to the wider community, for example, public benefit

Note 1: The Association of Governing Bodies (AGBIS) takes a lead in the promulgation of good governance practice throughout its member schools and is supported fully by the other associations in this aim. Each association also works with its own membership to promote good governance.