



# Guide to being a school governor

## Introduction

All state maintained primary, secondary and special schools, are accountable to their governing body, which in turn is accountable to parents and the community. Our school has 12 governors comprising: the Headteacher, one staff member, one local authority representative, three elected parents and six co-opted from the local community.

The Department for Education is very clear that the purpose of the governing body is to:

*“conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school”.*

Specifically governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- Setting the school’s vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school, pupils and the performance management of staff;
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure money is well spent.

This guide aims to set out the reality of being a governor so that anyone interested can understand the role better.

## What does a governor do?

As part of the governing body, an individual governor is expected to:

- Contribute to strategic discussions at governing body meetings which determine:
  - The vision and ethos of the school;
  - Clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school;
  - That all children, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
  - The school budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation;
  - The school staffing structure and key staffing policies;
  - The principles to be used by school leaders to set other school policies.
- Hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring school performance, including:
  - Agreeing the outcomes from the school self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan;
  - Considering all relevant data (including monitoring data) and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of school performance;
  - Asking challenging questions of school leaders;
  - Ensuring senior leaders have developed the required policies/procedures and the school is operating effectively according to those policies;
  - Listening to and reporting to the school stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community.

- Ensure the school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including:
  - Ensuring any necessary expertise on business management is available;
  - Provision of external advice where necessary;
  - Effective appraisal and CPD (Continuing Professional Development);
  - Suitable premises and resources to ensure their use have a positive impact.
- When required, serve on panels of governors to:
  - Appoint the headteacher and other senior leaders;
  - Performance manage and appraise the headteacher;
  - Set the headteacher's pay and agree pay recommendations for other staff;
  - Hear the second stage of staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
  - Hear appeals about pupil exclusions.

The role of governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role. Therefore, a governor does not:

- Deal with day-to-day operation of the school – this is the responsibility of the headteacher and senior leaders;
- Undertake audits of any sort – whether financial or health & safety – even if the governor has the relevant professional experience;
- Spend much time with the pupils of the school – if you want to work directly with children, there are many other valuable voluntary roles within the school;
- Fundraise – this is the role of the PTA – the governing body should consider income streams and the potential for income generation, but not carry out fundraising tasks;
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – the governing body monitors the quality of teaching in the school by requiring data from the senior staff and from external sources;
- Do the job of the school staff – if there is not enough capacity within the paid staff team to carry out the necessary tasks, the governing body need to consider and rectify this.

## **What are the expectations for a governor?**

In order to perform their role well, a governor is expected to:

- Get to know the school, including by visiting the school occasionally during school hours, and gain a good understanding of the school strengths and weaknesses;
- Attend induction training and regular relevant training and development events;
- Attend meetings (full governing body meetings and committee meetings) and read all the papers before the meeting so they are able to contribute to discussions;
- Undertake “link visits” with curriculum/strategic leads at the school to better understand their area of responsibility and monitor progress;
- Act in the best interest of all pupils of the school;
- Behave in a professional manner, as set down in the governing body's code of conduct, including acting in strict confidence.
- Undertake regular training, both by attending specific short courses and using online training resources.

## **What time commitment is involved?**

There is a significant time commitment involved in being an effective school governor and all are expected to play a full role in agreeing how the governing body works and any supporting activities.

The full governing body meets formally at least six times per academic year, once per school term. Dates are usually set well in advance and meetings generally last a maximum of two hours during the evening. Governors are expected to be well prepared for these meetings by reading all information sent out in advance. All governors are expected to attend these meetings and make positive contributions; apologies are only accepted with good reasons. There are also six full days per year spent in school to focus on particular aspects of school life and drive school improvements.

Tasks are often delegated to smaller working parties or pairs which must meet, often in school, between governing body meetings and provide a report to the full governing body. In addition, some governors volunteer to fulfil specific roles, such as being the Special Educational Needs governor, the Health and Safety governor or the link governor for a particular year/subject. Informal visits to special events such as drama productions and sports day are also encouraged.

## **What skills are required?**

Governors do not need specific skills, but many of the tasks they are required to undertake can benefit from general business knowledge such as budget planning and personnel functions. Local authorities are required to ensure that training for governors is available, including online learning, which ensures governors are properly inducted to their role and trained for specific tasks. These courses may require evening or weekend attendance but are essential in order to keep up-to-date with current legislation.

The governing body has a trained clerk to offer advice and guidance to governors. There is a comprehensive expenses policy which covers out of pocket costs, including any incurred in caring for dependents. Loss of earnings is not covered, but employers are required to release employees for them to conduct their governor role, although this may be unpaid.

## **Why become a governor?**

Governors are important members of the school leadership team and their contribution is assessed by Ofsted within the “effectiveness of leadership and management” element of an inspection. Whilst there is a work associated with performing the role well, there are also lots of benefits to being a governor.

As well as helping the school and the wider community there are personal benefits, including professional development benefits such as learning new skills and gaining expertise in new areas as well as broader social benefits such as a sense of achievement and working as part of a team. The majority of employers appreciate this and are supportive of their staff taking on the responsibility.

If you would like to find out more please e-mail the Chair of Governors at:  
[tobybutler@mps.kent.gov.uk](mailto:tobybutler@mps.kent.gov.uk)

## The Seven Principles of Public Life

As originally published by the Nolan Committee: The Committee on Standards in Public Life was established by the then Prime Minister in October 1994, under the Chairmanship of Lord Nolan, to consider standards of conduct in various areas of public life, and to make recommendations).

**Selflessness** – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

**Integrity** – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

**Objectivity** – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness** – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

**Honesty** – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership** – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

## Code of Conduct for School Governing Body

All school governors must sign the agreed code of conduct which sets out the expectations on, and commitment required from, individuals and trustees in order for the governing body to carry out its work properly within the school and the community. These include aspects specifically related to:

- Role & Responsibilities
- Commitment
- Relationships
- Confidentiality
- Conflicts of interest