

Being a Governor: a beginner's guide

Welcome.

This guide aims to give you an idea how the governing body works and what you will do as a governor.

Why am I here?

The governing body is responsible for the strategic direction of the school and is accountable for the school's success. Governors are responsible for monitoring and evaluating how well the school is doing.

The headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day management of the school. The relationship between the governing body and the headteacher is a close one: it is a partnership, balancing acting as critical friend and providing challenge.

Being a governor is rewarding but it's more than attending a few meetings a year. There is a lot of reading to do. You will get support from your fellow governors and from training courses.

What will I do?

You will be part of shaping the direction of the school.

You will

- read documents, for instance minutes of meetings; the School Development Plan; the school budget; government papers; Ofsted reports; data about performance of children
- attend meetings: two Full Governors meeting each term and up to two committee meetings (depending which committee you serve on)
- serve on a committee: either Resources or Teaching and Learning
- ask questions
- monitor and evaluate
- attend training for instance training for new governors. There is training about school finances, about analysing data, about appraising the headteacher, about safeguarding among other things

There are opportunities to serve on working parties which might be formed, for instance to look into school meals; to become a chair of a committee; take a lead on your committee, for instance in finance, safeguarding, Special Educational Needs and Disability.

Getting to know the school

As a governor you need to know the school, for instance:

- the progress children make
- their levels of attainment
- the quality of teaching
- how well particular groups of children do (for instance those receiving Free School Meals, those for whom English is not their first language, looked after children).

Governor's roles cover the following areas:

Strategic: agreeing the aims and values of the school; making sure the school has an effective School Development Plan which it uses to achieve improvement; setting a realistic and sustainable budget to achieve school's aims; responding to inspection judgements and devising related action plan.

Monitoring & evaluating the School Development Plan (SDP) to establish what the school is doing well, what it needs to do better; scrutinising and understanding data; asking questions; ensuring that governors have a strong evidence base to demonstrate they are performing their strategic role effectively; comparing the school's performance and use of budget to other schools (benchmarking).

Executive: taking direct responsibility for the recruitment of senior staff and some disciplinary matters; performance management of the headteacher.

Accountability: making sure parents are kept informed about what is happening in the school and taking parents views into account; demonstrating efficient use of the budget to achieve the school's aims with effective budget control.

Supporting: supporting and advising the headteacher.

Collective responsibility

Governors have a great deal of power – but only as a group. Individually, governors have no responsibility, liability or power. As a governor, you may find that individual parents raise issues with you in the hope that you will act on them. Remember that as you cannot act for the governing body, you should encourage parents to take the matter up with the class teacher if appropriate first and then the headteacher if they have not already done so. If you are ever in doubt as to what to do, get advice from the Chair of Governors.

Where do I start?

Your two most useful contacts will be the Chair of Governors and the Clerk to the Governors. All governor correspondence will come by email. It is a good idea to check emails at least weekly.

If you don't have access to a computer, we can arrange for you to use a computer at school.

You will need to read documents and attend training so you know what your responsibilities are.

Training and Advice

You will attend the New Governor training, run by Devon County Council. This is an excellent one-day course covering all the issues around becoming a school governor. Further courses relating to specific committees are available, and these will be advertised in the 'Devon Governor' magazine, which will be sent to you by email. Paper copies are available at governors' meeting..

Governor Services can help with any aspect of the 'governance' of schools, including duties, powers and responsibilities. They can also help with questions of procedure such as meetings, committees and minutes and are willing to listen in confidence where asked.

Essential Documents

You need to read and get to know the following:

- Governors' Handbook, Department for Education, September 2014
- Code of Conduct for Governors (which you will sign)
- School Development Plan: key document to support school improvement; reviewed and approved annually by the governors and monitored and evaluated over each year.
- Terms of Reference for each committee
- Our most recent Ofsted Report (on the school website)

Other sources of information:

- Times Educational Supplement (Friday) or www.tes.co.uk/governors
- On the Internet:
 - Devon Association of Governors: www.dag.gb.com – the clerk will provide a password
 - GEL: www.elc-gel.org/ On-line training for governors – the clerk will provide a password
 - Department for Education: www.gov.uk/schools-colleges/governance
 - National Association of Governors: www.nga.org.uk

Support from fellow governors

In order to help new governors to feel more at home in their role, an existing governor will make contact with you early on. This will be somebody to talk to, to ask questions of, and hopefully to be a familiar face at some of the meetings. You can read the minutes of previous full governors meetings on our website.

Meetings and Committees

Full Governing Body meetings are held twice each term. Our governing body has three committees: the Resources Committee; the Teaching and Learning Committee which meet twice a term; the Pay Committee which meets three times a year.

The committees are responsible for different areas of the school:

- **Resources:** finance, personnel, premises, health & safety
- **Teaching and Learning:** school development plan; curriculum; inclusion, SEND (special educational needs and disability), community links; safeguarding.
- **Pay Committee:** responsible for performance related pay.

The Pay Committee is made up of four governors including the headteacher.

All governors serve on either the Resources or the Teaching and Learning Committees. You will choose an area of responsibility which you will share with another governor.

We review membership of committees every year. You can say which areas you are most interested in. Sometimes governors move to another committee to develop new skills and understanding of other areas of the school.

If you can't attend a meeting, you let the Clerk know with your reason. Governors have to approve your absence. If you miss meetings for six months you will no longer be eligible to be a governor.

Monitoring Visits

The purpose of the visits is to enable governors to fulfil their role in monitoring and evaluating school performance in relation to the School Development Plan. Governors visit to observe, to learn and to help the governing body make informed decisions; we are not there to inspect the school.

You will be guided by your committee before you make your first visit. We have a procedure and forms to guide visits.

For each visit, you will need to fill out a visit form which you can get from the clerk. These forms help to monitor the work of the governing body to ensure that it is effective.

How to fit it all in?

Being a governor involves more than just taking an interest – though this is a crucial part of the job – it also takes time. The time you can devote can vary widely, depending on how involved you become and what needs doing.

It often takes some time to get used to your governor role and fit it into a busy life. If you work, your employer must, by law, allow you reasonable time off work in order to fulfil your role as a governor. It is a good idea to tell your employer about your role as a governor, remind them that you may occasionally need some time off work, and find out whether any leave will be paid or unpaid.

Confidentiality

Minutes of full governors' meeting are published. Discussions during the meeting are confidential – this is to make sure that issues can be fully discussed and different opinions are taken on board before a decision is reached. Some parts of the meeting may be 'Part 2', where everything is confidential – the Chair will make it clear when the meeting is in 'Part 2' discussions. This is usually for personnel matters.

Governors are in a position of trust, so always be careful not to discuss publicly anything you have been told in confidence.

Background checks

All new governors are checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service. This doesn't cost you anything. The Office staff will make the arrangements for the check for you.

And finally...

Enjoy your time as a school governor – it will sometimes be confusing and time consuming, but we hope it will also be ultimately satisfying, knowing that you are a part of a team working for the school and supporting the pupils, staff and other governors.