

The Role of the School Governor

School Governing Bodies

All state maintained primary, secondary and special schools, are accountable to their governing bodies, which in turn are accountable to parents and the community. Parent and staff representatives are elected to the governing body; the local authority appoints governors to the governing body and the relevant faith bodies appoint foundation governors in faith schools. In addition the governing body can appoint its own community governors, and it is traditionally these posts which the governing body uses to cover skills gaps, hence these posts often being offered to governors from the business community. Increasingly local authority appointment panels also look to the skills set of their appointees.

The Value of School Governance

Governing bodies make decisions which are in the best interests of the children and young people. Keeping the decision making as close as possible to those that are affected by the decisions makes for sound and efficient leadership and governance. The current government's commitment to the 'Big Society' supports this, and the school governance model fits into this concept neatly. Fulfilling the role of a school governor is, therefore, both a serious undertaking and enormously rewarding. Not only do governors bring their own knowledge and skills to the role, but, in learning how schools are run, they often develop their understanding of leadership. The majority of employers appreciate this and are supportive of their staff taking on the responsibility. In addition, contributing to the growth and development of a school and seeing tangible improvements in the attainment and well being of the children is a satisfying and important contribution to the local community.

The Role of the Governing Body

The governing body is responsible for the conduct of its school, and must promote high standards of educational achievement at the school. It is the school's accountable body and as such:

- provides a strategic view of the school by establishing a vision and setting the purpose and aims of the school within an agreed policy framework. It appoints and performance manages the headteacher, agreeing the school improvement strategy which includes setting statutory targets with supporting budgets and staffing structures;
- monitors and evaluates the work of the school by reviewing the performance of the headteacher, the effectiveness of the policy framework, progress towards targets, and the effectiveness of the school improvement strategy;
- signs off the self evaluation process and responds to school improvement service and Ofsted reports as necessary. In addition it holds the headteacher to account for the performance of the school and ensures that parents are involved, consulted and informed as appropriate, with information to the community being made available as required.

In order to do this, governors need to gain knowledge of how their school operates through training, by attending meetings, and by getting to know their school community, for example through a small number of visits to the school during the school day.

Governors need to work together as a team, under the leadership of the Chair of the governing body. Most governing bodies require their governors to sign a code of practice,

Meetings

Governing bodies are required to meet formally a minimum of three times a year. Meeting dates are usually set well in advance and meetings generally last between two and three hours. Governors are expected to be well prepared for these meetings and attendance is expected, with apologies only for good reasons. Some governing bodies will also have an annual 'away day' type event to review the previous year's strategy, and to set the following year's priorities.

Other Commitments

Many governing bodies meet more frequently than this, and most also delegate work to committees and/or working parties and task groups which meet between the governing body meetings. Governors will be expected to play a full role in agreeing how their governing body works, and then in supporting this. In addition some governors volunteer to fulfil specific roles, such as being the Special Educational Needs governor, or the Health and Safety governor, or the link governor for a particular year or subject.

Most governors arrange a couple of shorter visits to school and classrooms focusing on key priorities so that they can see how the school is addressing issues identified for development. In addition, informal visits to special events such as drama productions and sports day are generally encouraged.

Skills and Training

Governors do not need specific skills, but many of the tasks they are required to undertake can benefit from general business knowledge such as understanding management systems, budget planning and HR functions.

Local authorities are required to ensure that training for governors is available and most governing bodies buy into their local authority training packages (which may include online learning) to ensure that governors are properly inducted to their role and trained for specific tasks such as appointing the headteacher and then carrying out the headteacher's performance review. In addition a number of other training opportunities are available through a range of providers including Teachers TV which broadcasts programmes specifically aimed at governors.

Many governing bodies also belong to a local independent governor association, and join the national representative body, the National Governors' Association. It is often through these channels that governors develop their knowledge of wider issues affecting schools.

Support for Governors

Each governing body must have a clerk who both advises and services the governing body. All governing bodies should have a comprehensive expenses' policy which covers out of pocket costs including those incurred caring for dependents. Loss of earnings is not covered, but employers are required to release employees in order for them to conduct their governor role. Release may, however, be unpaid.