

Information for prospective governors

Across the city there are thousands of members of our community helping to support school leadership teams by volunteering their time and expertise as school governors - but what is it about the role which encourages so many committed volunteers to apply?

1. The purpose of governance

All schools have a Board that provides strategic leadership. Boards have three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

In a local authority maintained school the board is the Governing Board, who are usually supported by a number of committees.

Some schools are part of a multi academy trust where each school has a Local Governing Body which in turns reports to a Board of Trustees.

There are some differences in decision making authority between maintained schools and academies, largely around matters of finance, but otherwise governor roles are very similar.

Ensuring the school provides the best education for all its pupils should be at the heart of all governor business.

2. The types of governor

You do not need to be a parent of a child to be a school governor. The composition of a Governing Board or Local Governing Body includes several different categories of governor. These could include:

- Co-opted – appointed by the governors and the most common category of governor
- Parent – elected by the parents
- Staff – elected by the staff at school
- Foundation/Trust – appointed by the Diocese/Trust where appropriate
- Local Authority - often an elected member of the local political party

Regardless of category all governors share responsibilities and work as a team. Governors will be expected to work within an ethos of professionalism and high expectations which will be documented in a code of conduct which you will typically be asked to sign.

3. What does a governor do?

Individual governors alone do not carry responsibilities and have no power unless the Governing Board or Local Governing Body delegates a specific matter to them. Decisions are made in formal meetings by a consensus.

You should expect to be involved in:

- Developing the strategic plan for school
- Oversight of the curriculum being taught, monitoring pupil outcomes and agreeing priorities for improvement
- Agreeing school policies and practice which allow school leaders to carry out their responsibilities, and monitoring the implementation of these including those concerned with the health and safety of pupils and staff, discipline and attendance
- Ensuring school is taking account of stakeholder views through engagement with parents, pupils and staff
- Oversight of the school budget and how funds are being allocated

You will not be involved in:

- Dealing with personal issues in relation to a particular child
- Discussing the performance of individual children (data should be anonymised)
- Matters of day to day school management

4. What makes a good governor?

There are no formal qualifications required and, as a new school governor, you are not expected to come with a working knowledge of the education sector. These are some of the qualities and general requirements schools look for in a governor:

- a strong commitment to the role and to improving outcomes for children
- the inquisitiveness to question and analyse
- the willingness to learn
- good inter-personal skills
- appropriate levels of literacy in English
- sufficient numeracy skills to understand basic data
- willingness to attend appropriate training

Skills and knowledge

No one governor is expected to know everything. The strength of a Governing Board or Local Governing Body relies in its ability to attract members from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some governors may have qualifications or professional skills that are particularly useful. The Department for Education's Competency Framework for Governance lists the skills required for effectiveness in setting the strategic direction of the organisation, planning and prioritising, monitoring progress and managing change and is a useful reference point for a Governing Board or Local Governing Body at the point of governor recruitment.

Principles and personal attributes

Governors are holders of public office, and should therefore be prepared to work to the same principles as any paid public official. The principles and personal attributes that individuals bring to the board are as important as their skills and knowledge. All governors should fulfil their duties in line with the seven principles of public life, the Nolan principles (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty, leadership) which are fully listed in Appendix 1.

5. The time commitment

There are different operating models in different schools but being a governor involves far more than simply attending meetings. Schools operate over three terms, autumn, spring and summer, and the time commitment needed is at least 10-15 hours per term. This would typically include:

- Preparation for and attendance at meetings – usually one meeting of the Governing Board or Local Governing Body and one committee meeting. You will receive reports and analyse data from school leaders and, based on these, be expected to ask questions and provide support to improve educational provision. Meetings are most commonly held in the evening.
- School visits – one visit to school, under the direction of the board, to monitor the progress of a strategic priority or statutory duty and the production of a brief report to be shared with other governors.

Governors are also expected to take an interest in the life of the school including attending some of its events during the academic year.

Being a governor is a public duty and governors have a right to reasonable time off work, although this may be without pay. You should ask your company what entitlement you have.

6. The training and support you should expect to receive

Governance regulations set clear expectations including that governors undertake whatever training or development activity is needed to fill any gaps in their skills to contribute to effective governance. All governors will be invited, by their school, to undertake induction training and should complete this as soon as possible to gain an understanding of the role. Further, and more specific training, is also available and should be accessed where necessary to complement other sources of development, such as speaking to staff leads in school to increase your knowledge.

7. What's in it for you?

The governor role will allow you to gain a fascinating insight into how schools work and how the education sector is changing and continues to change. You are guaranteed to gain an appreciation of the work of teachers and school leaders as well as the challenges schools face. Being a school governor is a fantastic opportunity to make a difference, have an impact on education and positively influence children's lives. There's no denying that being a school governor is a challenge, but that's a good thing - because it's important. It may be that you are putting your professional skills to use in a new context or getting to grips with a whole new sector, but most people find being a governor is a very rewarding role.

8. Are you suitable and eligible to be a governor?

It is usual for prospective governors to arrange a meeting with the Headteacher and Chair of Governors to understand more about the school and its priorities, and to have a short tour. During this visit, which might operate as an informal interview, you might be asked questions such as:

- Why do you want to be a governor?
- What skills and experience can you bring to the board?

- Why do you think these would make you an effective governor?
- Why have you chosen this school?
- How much time can you dedicate to the role?
- How would you deal with a situation where you really disagree with others on the board?
- What do you understand about confidentiality on the board?

Anyone applying to become a governor will need to be checked through the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and should ensure that they are not disqualified on the grounds given in Appendix 2.

9. Sources of information

The [DfE governance handbook](#) outlines the core functions of governance.

The [competency framework for governance published by the DfE](#) documents the suggested behaviours required for effective governance.

Appendix 1

The Nolan Principles

In 1994, the UK government established a Committee on Standards in Public Life. The committee was chaired by Lord Nolan, and was tasked with making recommendations to improve standards of behaviour in public life. The first report of the committee established the seven principles of public life, also known as the “Nolan principles”.

The seven principles are outlined below:

- **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 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 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.

Appendix 2

Qualifications and disqualifications (regulation 17 and Schedule 4 to the Regulations)

Grounds for disqualification fall into three broad categories:

1. **general grounds;**
2. **grounds that apply to particular categories of governor; and**
3. **grounds that arise because of particular failings or actions on the part of the governor.**

All the grounds for disqualification apply also to associate members except that associate members can be registered pupils at the school and can be under 18.

1. General grounds

Registered pupils cannot be governors.

A governor must be aged 18 or over at the time of election or appointment.

A person cannot hold more than one governor post at the same school at the same time.

2. Grounds that apply to particular categories of governor

A person is disqualified from being a parent governor if they are an elected member of the LA or paid to work at the school for more than 500 hours (i.e. for more than one-third of the hours of a full-time equivalent) in any consecutive twelve month period (at the time of election or appointment).

A person is disqualified from being a local authority governor if they are eligible to be a staff governor at the school.

A person is disqualified from being a partnership governor if they are:

- a parent of a registered pupil at the school;
- eligible to be a staff governor at the school;
- an elected member of the LA; or
- employed by the local authority in connection with its education functions.

3. Grounds that arise because of particular failings or actions on the part of the governor

A person is disqualified from being a governor of a particular school if they have failed to attend the meetings of the governing body of that school for a continuous period of six months, beginning with the date of the first meeting they failed to attend, without the consent of the governing body. This does not apply to the Headteacher or to foundation governors appointed by virtue of their office.

A foundation, local authority, co-opted or partnership governor at the school who is disqualified for failing to attend meetings is only disqualified from being a governor of any category at the school during the twelve month period starting on the date on which they were disqualified.

A person is disqualified from holding or continuing to hold office if that person:

- is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order, debt relief restrictions order, an interim debt relief restrictions order or their estate has been sequestrated and the sequestration has not been discharged, annulled or reduced
- is subject to a disqualification order or disqualification undertaking under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, a disqualification order under Part 2 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, a disqualification undertaking accepted under the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, or an order made under section 429(2)(b) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (failure to pay under county court administration order)
- has been removed from the office of charity trustee or trustee for a charity by the Charity

Commission or Commissioners or High Court on grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement, or under section 34 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 from being concerned in the management or control of any body

- is included in the list of people considered by the Secretary of State as unsuitable to work with children or young people
- is barred from any regulated activity relating to children
- is subject to a direction of the Secretary of State under section 142 of the Education Act 2002 or section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- is disqualified from working with children or from registering for child-minding or providing day care
- is disqualified from being an independent school proprietor, teacher or employee by the Secretary of State
- has been sentenced to three months or more in prison (without the option of a fine) in the five years before becoming a governor or since becoming a governor (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has received a prison sentence of two and a half years or more in the 20 years before becoming a governor (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has at any time received a prison sentence of five years or more (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has been convicted and fined for causing a nuisance or disturbance on school or educational premises during the five years prior to or since appointment or election as a governor
- refuses a request by the clerk to make an application to the Disclosure and Barring Service for a criminal records certificate
- has been removed from a governing board during their term as an elected parent or staff governor within the last five years (from date of removal).