

A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE SCHOOL GOVERNORS OR ACADEMY TRUSTEES

What boards of governors/trustees do and what being a governor/trustee involves.

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INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this guidance then it is possible that you are thinking about becoming a governor in a maintained school, a trustee in an academy or a governor on a Local Governance Committee in a Multi-Academy Trust.

It will be an important decision for you to make and one that you will need to consider very carefully as the role is demanding, but at the same time rewarding and extremely important to bettering the outcomes for the young people in education.

Enthusiastic and committed people are needed to volunteer for one of the largest volunteer forces in the country, and you will have an important role to play in raising school or academy standards. You will be a person who will want to make a positive contribution to the education of children and young people.

Although the role of a governor or trustee is subject to qualification and disqualification regulations (further information is contained in a separate document on the service website www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/governance in the Becoming a Governor file) this guidance document is intended to give you an understanding of the role and the time commitment involved to help inform your decision.

Why do schools have a governance board?

Boards of governors (also known as governing bodies) or boards of trustees are responsible for the conduct of the school or academy and they are accountable for ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in their educational setting. In Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) a Local Governance Committee or Local Academy Committee (LGCs or LACs) also have some delegated accountability on behalf of the Trust board for an academy within the MAT.

For maintained schools this will be reflected in legislation and for academies within their funding agreements and articles of association as well as relevant legislation.

The government has high expectations of those in governance and that as an individual who is part of the corporate body for a maintained school, a stand-alone academy trust or a multi-academy trust you will have a strong focus on 3 core strategic functions:

1. Setting the school's/academy's vision, ethos and strategic direction;
2. Holding the Headteacher/Principal to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school or academy and making sure that its money is well spent.

These functions underpin the criteria that Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) use to judge the effectiveness of those in governance in all maintained schools and academies.

“The role of the board is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role” (NGA – National Governors Association).

It is the Headteacher's or Principal's responsibility to manage and control the school or academy, underpinned and supported by the strategic framework established by the board.

For Local Governance Committees in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) the focus will depend on their delegated authority but is likely only to focus on the 2nd core function.

These core functions are underpinned by 6 key features of effective governance:-

1. Strategic leadership that sets and champions vision, ethos and strategy.
2. Accountability that drives up educational standards and financial performance.
3. People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity.

4. Structures that reinforce clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
5. Compliance with statutory and contractual requirements.
6. Evaluation to monitor and improve the quality and impact of governance.

Governors and trustees are recruited to deliver the board's core functions effectively based on their skills, expertise and knowledge.



Role of the Governor or Trustee

Each individual governor or trustee is a member of a body that is established in law as a corporate body. Individual governors or trustees may not act independently of the rest of the governance board, and the board's formal work and decision-making is dealt with at meetings.

As a governor or trustee you are part of the team that has a strategic role and with the expectation of:-

1. Contributing to the strategic discussions at board meetings which determine:
 - The vision and ethos of the school or academy;
 - Clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school or academy;
 - That all pupils/students, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
 - The school's or academy's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation;
 - The school's or academy's staffing structure and key staffing policies;
 - The principles to be used by school or academy leaders to set other school or academy policies.

2. Holding the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's or academy's performance, including:
 - Agreeing the outcomes from the school's or academy's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school/academy development plan;
 - Considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by leaders and external sources on all aspects of school/academy performance;
 - Asking challenging questions of school/academy leaders.
3. Ensuring all staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including any necessary CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and that the way in which those resources are used has impact on educational outcomes.
4. When required, serve on panels to:
 - Appoint the Headteacher and other senior leaders;
 - Appraise the Headteacher and the performance management of staff;
 - Consider pupil exclusions;
 - Sit on a final stage complaints hearing.

Expectation and Time Commitment

Most boards have adopted a written code of conduct so that all governors or trustees know what is expected of them. The code of conduct includes the following principles and says that all governors/trustees should:

- Have the well-being and success of the school or academy as their central concern;
- Act fairly and without prejudice at all times;
- Understand that all governors or trustees have equal status;
- Appreciate that in general no governor/trustee has individual power (there are certain exceptions);
- Be actively involved in the work of the board and accept a fair share of responsibility;
- Make every effort to attend and participate in the meetings and prepare for them by reading papers and thinking about agenda items. They must accept decisions made by the majority;
- Work in partnership with the Headteacher/Principal and all the staff;
- Understand and balance their own strategic role with the Headteacher's or Principal's responsibility for the implementation of policy and the day-to-day management of the school or academy;
- Make the effort to get to know the school/academy (or academies in a multi-academy trust) and its staff, pupils and parents. This involves supporting the school's or academy's activities. It also involves first-hand

experience of pupils' learning, through a 'Governors/Trustees in School Policy' agreed by staff and the board;

- Ensure that matters discussed in meetings that are deemed confidential are not discussed outside the meeting;
- Know and comply with the procedures adopted by the board for dealing with criticisms and complaints.



Being an effective governor or trustee does mean promising to commit time to the role. As well as attending meetings you will need to develop your knowledge and understanding of the work of the board and school/academy; this will mean visiting to get to know it, preferably during the working day, or attending training.

There will be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting and appointing a Headteacher/Principal or serving on a panel of the board such as pupil exclusion, complaints or staff discipline/grievance and your time commitment is likely to increase if you become the chair of the board or chair of a committee.

Support for Governors or Trustees

We work in partnership with dioceses, schools and academies to support boards by providing:

- Information, advice and guidance on governance roles and procedures by telephone and email.
- A comprehensive training and development programme, including induction.
- Network magazine – a ½ termly magazine distributed electronically.
- Access to our service website
www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/governance

Support from your school/academy

Every school or academy should have an induction programme for its new governors or trustees when their appointment has been confirmed. A tour of the site will be particularly helpful if you are not already involved with the life of the school or academy.

Governance Allowances - Every board must have a protocol/policy on what allowances will be paid to those in governance. Expenses may cover the cost of child-minding or looking after a dependant relative during board meetings. Travelling expenses to attend board meetings are not generally paid but may be paid, in line with HMRC guidelines, if a governor or trustee has to travel elsewhere on behalf of the board.

Support from your employer

Under section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, if you are employed then you are entitled to “reasonable time off” to undertake governance duties. However, the law does not state what “reasonable time off” is and you will need to negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed and whether or not this is with pay, or with holiday or time off in lieu.

Most board meetings will be held in the evening so this shouldn’t necessarily affect your working life but there is an expectation that you might be required to attend the school or academy during the day in regard to:

- Meet a member of staff or to visit a classroom;
- Attend a school/academy assembly or function;
- Be part of a recruitment/appointment panel of staff or even a Headteacher.



What to do Next

If after reading the above you feel that you might have the right level of expertise, skills and knowledge and more importantly feel that you are able to commit the time required there are two ways to find out about vacancies in your area:

- Contact schools or academies in your area direct - they will let you know of any current vacancies that they have that you might be eligible for. If you are a parent of a child at the school or academy you will be informed, along with other parents, of any vacancies for parent governors or trustees.
- Contact SSE-Governance Services – if you don’t have a specific school or academy in mind or have further questions then contact the governance team:

SSE-Governance Services
County Hall
Taunton
TA1 4DY

Email – sgs@somerset.gov.uk