

## A GUIDE TO SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

(Note: information is provided for all school governors by the Department for Education. The Governors' Handbook is available to download at [www.gov.uk/government/publications](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications))

### WHAT DOES THE GOVERNING BODY DO?

The functions of the Governing Body include the following core functions:-

- ensuring that the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined;
- ensuring that the head teacher performs his or her responsibilities for the educational performance of the school;
- ensuring the sound, proper and effective use of the school's financial resources.

In exercising their functions the governing body shall –

- act with integrity, objectivity and honesty and in the best interests of the school and all pupils;
- be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and in particular shall be prepared to explain their decisions and actions to interested parties.

It is the role of the governor to take a strategic overview of the school. This will include:

- shaping the vision for the school
- understanding the school's strengths and weaknesses and setting targets for improvement
- monitoring and evaluating the progress made or addressing weaknesses by challenging and supporting the school
- approving plans and policies to promote achievement and learning
- accounting for the school's and governing body's performance
- carrying out the governing bodies statutory duties
- acting as the "critical friend" to the school

It is also the duty of each governor to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of the governing body. This would include attending meetings regularly, reading the papers in advance and contributing to the discussions. A good quality Induction process should be in place and all governors should receive regular training and be given opportunities to gain experience of leadership within the governing body.

### **"GETTING STARTED"**

As part of its annual governor training programme the local authority offers this course at a time and place that best suites the school as an introduction to governance for new and recently appointed governors. Information on the courses is provided by the Clerk and available on the Smart Solutions. Please ask your Clerk to provide information on the training available. **It is important that new governors try to attend one of these courses.**

## WHAT KINDS OF GOVERNOR ARE THERE?

The school's Instrument of Government (a copy of which is available from your school) is the legal basis for each Governing Body. It sets out the size and composition of the governing body and specifies the categories of governors and number of governors in each category. It also specifies the term of office for each category of governor, normally this is four years. All categories of governor have equal standing and should act in the best interest of all pupils. Each Governing Body includes the following in the combination set out in the Instrument of Government:

**Parent governors** are elected by and from among parents of registered pupils at the school. Parent governors are not "mandated" by the parent body to take a particular stance on governance issues but to bring a parental viewpoint to discussions and to act, as every other governor does, in the best interests of the school and all pupils in the school. The election should be informed by the skills audit.

**Staff governors** are elected by and from among the staff at the school. They have a similar remit to parent governors in that they do not represent other staff members but act in the interest of all pupils in the school.

**The Headteacher**, unless they decide they do not wish to be a governor, but this place cannot be taken by anyone else.

**Local Authority governors** are **nominated** by the Local Authority (i.e. North Yorkshire County Council) and **appointed** by the governing body. The selection process is based on having skills appropriate to the school.

**Foundation governors** (at voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and some foundation schools only) are appointed by the body or bodies named in the Instrument. They are appointed to preserve and develop the religious character of the school, if it has a religious character, and to ensure the school complies with the trust deed. As with all of the other governors they must also act in best interest of all pupils in school.

**Associate Members are not** governors but they are people appointed by the governing body to serve on committees. They are usually appointed to provide a particular area of expertise to the benefit of the committee and governing body. They can be appointed for a period of between one and four years. The Governing Body can give voting rights to associate members on committees but associate members cannot vote on the full Governing Body.

**Co-opted governors** are appointed by the governing body. They are people who, in the opinion of the governing body, have the skills required to contribute to the effective governance and success of the school.

## AS A GOVERNOR, YOU NEED TO UNDERSTAND:

- ✓ the roles of governance, and how these connect with the management role of the head teacher;
- ✓ that the governing body is a corporate body under the law with statutory duties and powers, and is "the responsible authority" for the school. It follows from this that no action may be taken by any individual governor on behalf of the governing body unless authorised by it (except the Chair in an urgency situation as defined in Regulations)

- ✓ that governance should be carried out on the basis of, and in a spirit of, team work;
- ✓ the way work is done is in meetings, and the Regulations about the “proceedings” of meetings are statutory. Where regulations do not apply, there may be Standing Orders adopted by the governing body;
- ✓ that there is much to learn about your school and you have a responsibility to ensure you undertake training to ensure your skills and knowledge are as up to date as possible.

## ABOUT MEETINGS:

- ✓ the importance of preparing, by reading the papers received, giving some thought to the items on the agenda and arriving at meetings with any questions you may have to clarify issues with the Headteacher and school staff;
- ✓ the importance of regular and punctual attendance. Failure to attend any meetings of the governing body in a period of six months without the consent of the governing body will result in disqualification. It should be remembered that sending apologies is a courtesy but it is not the same as being given “consent”;
- ✓ the importance of observing "committee disciplines" to enable the meeting to be conducted efficiently and the business discharged effectively. Committee disciplines include:
  - Working democratically;
  - Declaring interests and withdrawing when appropriate;
  - Speaking, when invited, to the item under consideration and seeking clarification to ensure you understand the attainment and achievement of all pupils;
  - Not raising items outside the agenda without prior notice and agreement of the Chair;
  - Keeping contributions "to the point";
  - Respecting others' viewpoints;
  - Accepting collective responsibility for decisions.
  - **the importance of discretion: respecting the privacy of all discussion in the meeting and observing the confidentiality of matters which the governing body decide will be confidential.**

## IN GENERAL:

- ✓ the importance of bringing to the governing body values, attitudes and knowledge of the world, as well as any particular expertise, which can help the school better serve its pupils and community.

## SUMMARY OF THE PRINCIPAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNING BODIES

Curriculum	Ensure curriculum meets legal requirements. Hear any complaints about curriculum and appeals against head's decision to alter National Curriculum for pupil. Must ensure only approved external qualifications and syllabuses taught. Must decide in primary schools whether school should provide sex education, and have a policy on content and organisation in secondary schools.
Religious Education and Collective Worship	See that daily worship and that RE delivered in accordance with agreed syllabus except in controlled schools where the Trust Deed makes provisions or in aided schools in line with the religious character as specified in 'The Designation of Schools Having a Religious Character (England) Order 1999'.
Special Educational Needs	Make every effort to meet needs of SEN pupils and ensure teachers know of their needs. Refer pupils who may need extra support and ensure the Headteacher is meeting the legal requirements for all SEN children.
Finance	Decide how to spend delegated budget within terms of LA delegation scheme.
Staff	Select the headteacher; decide staff numbers with the Headteacher; assist the Headteacher in making appointments where appropriate and place on suitable grade; set disciplinary rules and procedures; hear staff grievances; ensure a policy is in place for the performance management requirements and pay policy.
Admissions	Must admit pupils (community and controlled) in line with LA policy. In aided schools act as admission authority.
Equal Opportunities	Ensure no discrimination against pupils, job applicants or staff on grounds of gender, race or disability.
Pupil Discipline and Attendance	Must agree a statement and policies on discipline and consider representations about exclusions. Must report on unauthorised absences.
Providing Information	Must publish: - prospectus on the school website; whole school results KS1-3, school complaints policy, pupil premium information and other information required by statute*
Ofsted Inspection	Notify parents of inspection, receive and publish inspection report, draw up post-inspection action plan and report on progress with issues identified.
Health and Safety	Must ensure buildings, equipment and materials are safe and no risk to health. Set up procedures for implementing Health and safety Policy and make sure they are followed.
Charging for School Activities	Must have a published policy on charging for activities. Although schools cannot charge for school-time activities they may still invite parents and others to make voluntary contributions.
School Building	Control use of premises outside the school day, considering the needs of the local community. In aided schools carry out most external repairs, alterations and capital building work possibly aided by DCFS grant.

\*Further, more detailed information is available in the Governors' handbook published by the DFE and available to download from their website.