

1 Good Governance Guides

So you want to be a Governor?

When considering becoming a governor many questions come to mind. This guide aims to answer some of those questions and help you to consider the role of a school governor in more detail.

What is a governing body?

The Government requires that each school has a management team, a governing body. This team is made up of the various stakeholders that the school serves, parents, local authority, staff, community and dioceses. Governors are either elected or appointed, e.g. Parent Governors are elected from the parent body; the Local Authority (LA) appoints LA Governors the governing body appoints Community Governors.

What does a governing body do?

The governing body works in partnership with the headteacher, staff, parents and the LA to raise standards of achievement in the school. As a governor you will be part of this team, led by the Chairman of Governors. The main functions of the governing body are to:

- ◆ provide a **Strategic View**
- ◆ act as a **Critical Friend**
- ◆ ensure **Accountability**.

How is that achieved?

Each governing body develops its own system for meetings, monitoring and other school involvement. However, there is a general structure for governing body functions and this may help you to gauge the time commitment involved.

Meetings

- ◆ Full governing body – there is a statutory requirement for the governing body to meet 3 times per year. However, most governing bodies meet more often, allowing them to split meetings between school-focused issues and other business (e.g. LA, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), community etc.)
- ◆ Committees - meet as determined by their terms of reference, the framework agreed by the governing body, under which the committee operates. Some committees can be empowered to make decisions on behalf of the governing body. Areas covered can include finance, personnel, curriculum and premises/health and safety. It is through committees that much of the strategic and monitoring role of the governing body is undertaken.

Preparation

For meetings to be effective you need to prepare by reading minutes and papers relevant to the agenda. There will also be policy documents that you need to familiarise yourself with in order to understand the work of the school (and also to make the job more interesting for you).

Visits

As you become familiar with your school you will discover that as a community it has a rich and varied life!

You may be invited to special events, such as productions, sports days and special assemblies. Some governing bodies have planned governor visits to different areas of the school that are arranged with the headteacher and class teacher.

These visits will help you to get to know the staff and pupils and see the school at work, invaluable knowledge as you help develop policy and look to raise standards of achievement.

Specialist governors

As you have read through this Guide you will note that we have referred to the 'governing body' as opposed to 'governors'. This is because individual governors have no powers themselves and must always act corporately.

However, governors do need to share the workload of the governing body and part of this is to appoint 'specialist' governors. Their role is to monitor and report on specific areas, e.g. Literacy, Numeracy, ICT, etc. In Surrey there are also Link Governors who are responsible for training and development of the governing body.

You may be able to use your professional abilities to the best advantage. However, be open to developing new skills, being a governor is not an extension of your full time occupation and you may discover hidden talents!

Training

Training is an important part in the development and effectiveness of the governing body. As a new governor it is highly recommended that you attend induction training sessions, and, once you have decided upon which committees you will serve, training that will help you to develop your skills and understanding. There may also be whole governing body training, usually once per year, for specific issues, such as Preparing for an OFSTED Inspection, Self-Evaluation, etc. Additional helpful information is available on the FourS website at: <http://www.fours.co.uk/>.

How long will I have to serve?

As a governor you will be appointed/elected for a term of up to four years. You can, of course, resign during that time or continue beyond the four years. There are governors in Surrey who have served 20+ years!

However, be warned! You will quickly find that it is a fascinating role! It is a privilege to be a part of a child's education, and a tremendous responsibility as you will be a role model in the school community. You will be a member of a team that is constantly looking to raise standards of achievement and you will increasingly enjoy your place alongside your colleagues, the staff and pupils. As a school governor you will contribute towards making a difference in your local community.

We are grateful to you for considering this role and look forward to working with you in the future.

Support and advice is always available to governors from Governance Consultancy.

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