

Would you like to be a governor?

So you are thinking of becoming a school governor

You may have received notification from your children's school that there is a vacancy for a parent governor, seen an advert from your local council looking for local authority governors, or received a request from your local church to put yourself forward.

But what is it all about? Who are school governors and what do they do?

Who are school governors?


School governors are people who want to make a positive contribution to children's education.

Governors are the largest volunteer force in the country and have an important part to play in raising school standards through their three key roles of

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

The role of the governing body is absolutely key to the effectiveness of a school. Time and time again, Ofsted (the national inspection body for schools) has noted that the most effective schools demonstrate effective leadership and management - including by the governing body.

There are different types of school with different categories of governor. Almost anyone over 18 years of age can apply to become a governor. There are no particular qualifications as governing bodies work as teams, with different skills and abilities demonstrated by each team member. Where possible prospective governors are matched to the governing bodies which can best make use of their particular skills. A willingness to give time to the role is important, and a capacity for working with other people.



The governors' role is not about fundraising, neither is it about cheerleading for the school - though governors might do both those things. School governors provide strategic leadership and accountability in schools. Governors appoint the headteacher and carry out their performance appraisal. In some schools the site is owned by the governing body. It is governors who hold the main responsibility for finance in schools, and it is governors who work with the headteacher to make the tough decisions about balancing resources.

What qualities do you need to be a school governor?

To be effective as a school governor you will need:

- An interest in schools, wanting to work for the good of young people and to serve your community;
- An ability to work as part of a team, and to be the sort of person who is not afraid to speak out or ask questions;
- A willingness to learn;
- Reliability and integrity

What is a governing body and what does it do?

Governors are the strategic leaders of the school - the governing body has overall responsibility for the way the school is run, promoting the highest standards of achievement for its pupils. The governing body establishes a strategic framework for the school by

- Setting its aims and objectives
- Setting policies for achieving those aims and objectives
- Setting targets for achieving those aims and objectives

The governing body also has to monitor and evaluate the school's progress towards achieving these aims and objectives. And it needs to review this strategic framework regularly in the light of that progress.

A governing body should support and challenge the headteacher. Governors should stand up for their school and for their Head - but the governing body should also be prepared to ask difficult questions, seek further information and give constructive criticisms.



In law a governing body is a corporate body - this means that individual governors are protected from being held personally liable for any actions and decisions the governing body makes. As long as a governor acts honestly, reasonably and in good faith, any liability will fall to the governing body rather than on individual members.

So how do I become a governor?

There are different kinds of governors and different types of schools and as a result different methods of appointment. The table overleaf sets out the different kinds of governors and how they are appointed to their position. If you are interested in becoming a governor there are a number of routes you could follow:

If you have a child/children at school:

The school should automatically notify you when a vacancy for a parent governor arises. All parents of registered pupils are eligible to stand for election. If you do not have children at school then you can still be a governor by following one of the routes below.

Contact your local school and ask about their arrangement for appointing co-opted, foundation or partnership governors.

Contact the Peterborough Governor Services Team who can provide you with information and an application form for nomination as an Authority Governor

Alternatively, you could contact the School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS). SGOSS is a charity which recruits volunteers to become governors throughout England www.sgoss.org.uk



Particular roles

Governing bodies can appoint governors with specific responsibilities, for Special Education Needs for example. Any governor with a particular responsibility should have terms of reference setting out what is expected of them.

Quorum

The quorum for any governing body meeting and vote in a maintained school must be half of the complete membership of the governing body, excluding vacancies. For academies, the quorum is usually three governors, or one third of the membership, whichever is the greater.

Voting

Every question decided at a governing body meeting must be determined by a majority of votes of those governors present. If there are an equal number of votes, the Chair has a casting vote.

The same rule applies for votes at a committee meeting. The governing body can also give limited voting rights to associate members on committees.

Visiting the school

Governors need to be able to visit their school occasionally to help them develop their understanding of it - but they don't have the right to enter the school whenever they wish. Governors should arrange visits with the headteacher.

Dos and Don'ts


Dos

- Do remember that the governing body works as a team.
- Governors must accept collective responsibility - even on decisions where you are voted against.
- Governors observe confidentiality, especially on staffing and pupil discipline.
- Do remember that all governors have equal status. Staff governors in particular are governors, not staff representatives.
- Do make a difference; you are there for a reason; make your views known.
- Do attend meetings.

Don'ts

- Governors should not raise issues relating to individual children or employees.
- Governors should not speak out about governing body decisions in public.
- Governors should not go to meetings unprepared - read the paperwork.
- Do not agree to be a governor unless you are willing to give the time - being a school governor is a serious public role requiring genuine commitment.

Governors should not leave all the work to the Head and Chair.



Will I be supported as a governor?

Definitely - there's a wealth of support and advice for governors.

Training

This is highly recommended and some governing bodies have protocols for mandatory training for their governors. No matter how experienced people may be, training will help them become more effective school governors and keep up with constant changes in education. Induction training for new governors is particularly important, in recognition of the significant responsibilities.

The governing body has overall responsibility for training its members - each body should consider its needs and how training can help it meet them. Governing bodies often nominate a 'link governor' responsible for ensuring that training needs are identified and met.

Peterborough Governor Services offers a range of training courses free of charge for individual governors. A newsletter providing information on courses is issued each term, and Governor Services staff are at the other end of the phone line to help with any queries.

The Governor Training Programme includes training programmes and support for new governors, clerks and chairs.

Can I get time off work to attend governors' meetings?

Under the Employment Rights Act 1996, employees who are school governors are entitled to reasonable time off to carry out their duties. What constitutes 'reasonable time off' has to be agreed on between you and your employer.

An employer may give time off with pay, but doesn't have to do so. This is also a matter for discussion between you and your employer



Different types of governors and which types of schools have them.

GOVERNOR TYPE	SCHOOL TYPE	HOW APPOINTED
Parent	All schools	Elected by parents of pupils at the school*
Co-opted	Community, voluntary controlled and aided schools and some academies	Appointed by the governing body
Local Authority	Community, voluntary controlled and aided schools and some academies	Nominated by the local authority, appointed by the governing body
Foundation	Foundation (with a foundation body), voluntary aided, and academies	Appointed by the foundation body or Academy Trust
Partnership	Foundation schools (without a foundation)	Appointed by the governing body following nomination from parents or the local community
Staff	All schools	Elected by staff at the school**
Sponsor Governors	All schools (not compulsory)	Appointed by the governing body following nominations from school sponsors - (someone who gives substantial assistance to the school - financial or in kind)
Associate members	All schools (not compulsory)	Appointed by the governing body, Associate members are not governors and have limited voting rights
Additional Governors	All schools - but only in certain circumstances	Appointed by the local authority or the Secretary of State to schools causing concern



What are the different types of school?

Most schools are local authority maintained, but there are differences in the way they are governed. The main types of maintained school are:

- **Community schools** - where the local authority employs staff, owns the land and buildings, and sets admissions arrangements.
- **Voluntary aided** - the governing body employs staff and sets admissions. Many of these are church schools and the school's land and buildings are normally owned by a charitable foundation.
- **Voluntary controlled schools** - almost always church schools, with land and buildings often owned by a charitable foundation. The local authority employs school staff and sets admissions.

Academies are independent state schools, funded by the Department of Education, via the Education Funding Agency. Governance arrangements are set out in the academy's Articles of Association

How big is the governing body?

The previous table set out the different types of governors and the different types of schools. For maintained schools, the law sets out the minimum size of governing bodies and the number of each type of governor they can have. For example, all maintained schools must have at least two parent governors.

Governing bodies should have a minimum of seven members - every maintained school has an Instrument of Government, which sets out the size of the governing body.

The maximum term of office for all categories of governor is four years, but the governing body can decide to set a shorter term of for one or more category of governors, or for individual governors.



Who may not be a governor?

Regulations set out the reasons why a person may be excluded from being a governor. These can be found online or requested from Governor Services. Reasons include insolvency, some criminal convictions, or being banned from working from working with children.

Can governors be removed?

Governors can be removed from office depending on what category of governor they are.

Where governors are appointed the appointing body has the right to remove them from office; so the governing body can remove co-opted, partnership and sponsor governors, the local authority can remove local authority governors and the school's foundation body/trust can remove foundation governors. The governing body can also remove parent governors, but only if they were appointed. The governing body has no power to remove elected parent governors or staff governors.

In certain limited circumstances a governor can be suspended for up to 6 months by the governing body.

How does a governing body work?

A governing body has a great deal of freedom in how it runs its business. By law a maintained school governing body has to meet at least 3 times a year, but the governing body can set additional meetings if it wishes.

Full Governing Body meetings

Full governing body meetings are the main forum for the governing body to discuss issues and make decisions. All governors should make every effort to attend meetings. Of course there will be times that meetings clash with your other commitments, in which case make sure that you have informed the Clerk to the Governing Body and Chair of the Governing Body as soon as possible. A governor can be disqualified from office if they fail to attend governing body meetings over a 6 month period without the agreement of the governing body.



Papers for governing body meetings should be circulated by the Clerk at least 7 days in advance of the meeting. Papers usually include: the Agenda, minutes of the previous meeting, the Head's report and any other reports to be discussed at the meeting. It is important that governors read the papers in advance of the meeting - it is not possible to fulfil your remit to challenge and support effectively if you are not properly prepared.

Committees

Most governing bodies use committees, the most common covering staff, finance, premises and pupil achievement. However, some bodies have dispensed with committees and instead have more frequent full governing body meetings. Any decision to set up a committee has to be properly minuted and its terms of reference recorded. A governing body can delegate any of its statutory functions to a committee, a governor or the headteacher, subject to prescribed restrictions.

Chair and vice-chair

All governing bodies have to have a Chair and Vice-Chair - they must be elected, and staff governors are excluded from the role. The governing body can set the term of office which is usually a year or two years.

In cases of urgency the Chair or Vice-Chair has the power to take action on behalf of the governing body, if a delay is likely to be seriously detrimental to the school, a pupil, parents or member of staff.

Clerk

All governing bodies must appoint a Clerk, whose job includes convening meetings, taking minutes and keeping a register of attendance. Generally the Clerk works with the Chair, fellow governors and head to support the governing body. Governors, associate members and the headteacher of the school cannot be appointed Clerk though if the Clerk is unable to attend a meeting, the governors can appoint a member of the governing body (but not the head) to act as Clerk for that meeting.

An effective Clerk is an invaluable resource for the governing body and it is recommended that all governing bodies appoint a properly trained professional Clerk.

