



LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

New Governors Getting Started



“ The history of the school governor is all about the belief which people have had for centuries that education is not just a matter for the educator, and that the precious light of ordinariness must be allowed to shine on expert activities if those activities are to be healthy ”

Joan Sallis, leading writer on school governance



What are Governing Bodies For?

- Shaping the school's aims, values and ethos.
- Promoting high standards of education.
- Planning the school's long-term future.
- Appointing the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Ensuring proper financial management of the school.
- Communicating openly with parents, the local community and the local authority.
- Supporting and challenging the school to improve.
- Governors govern rather than manage. They are there to give direction and focus by performing a vital strategic role.

What are the Rewards of Being a Governor?

Schools are fascinating places. Being a governor can be very rewarding because you are:

- investing in the next generation;
- using your personal qualities and expertise to help the school, its pupils and staff;
- developing new skills;
- acquiring new knowledge;
- making new friends;
- developing a sense of partnership and involvement in the community.

Governors do not need to be education experts. The most effective governors:

- *Listen*
- *Think*
- *Ask Questions*
- *Take an interest in the life and work of their school*



What Being a School Governor Involves

TIME – as much as you can offer!

1. Formal meetings:

How much time will vary from school to school. Governing bodies generally meet as a full body about twice a school term, often more frequently, and can be supported by committees that discuss key areas such as standards, the curriculum, resources, premises and health and safety. It's important that you regularly attend the main meetings and any committees on which you serve.

Most meetings take place on weekday evenings but some governing bodies meet during the working day. Some reading will be necessary as preparation for these meetings. It is difficult to quantify the time commitment involved. The average has been found to be around 6-8 hours a month but much more if you are a chair of governors or a chair of a committee.

2. School visits

The best way to get to know the school is to see it in action. You should visit a school to learn – not to judge. Visits should be:

- arranged through the headteacher;
- focused on a particular subject or issue, usually one of the school's priorities for improvement;
- agreed by the whole governing body;
- reported back to the relevant committee or whole governing body.

3. Reading

You will get plenty to read! It is important you keep up-to-date with agendas, minutes of meetings and supporting papers. The CD-Rom "A Guide to the Law" from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is a useful reference for the national statutory framework. The West Sussex Handbook for Governors and Clerks provides detail of the support available locally for governors. 'Gen' is a newsletter for governors and clerks that shares good practice.

4. General Support

As a governor you will be expected to show your support for the school by attending parents' meetings, concerts, prize givings, plays etc. whenever possible.

5. Training Courses

West Sussex provides an extensive governor learning and development programme which is sent to all governors as part of the Handbook. Courses on offer are aimed at equipping governors with knowledge, skills and confidence in a whole range of areas. Governing bodies subscribe to these services – there is no charge to individual governors.

Your appointment as a school governor means you have joined a body of volunteers, numbering over 4000 people in West Sussex who, in partnership with headteachers, are responsible for:

- 4 nursery schools;
- 239 primary and middle schools;
- 40 secondary schools;
- 13 special schools;
- educating around 95,000 children.

A School Governing Body is made up of:

- **Parent and Staff governors** – all of whom are elected. They are representatives of those groups. They should keep in touch with the groups who elected them but make up their own minds about how to vote on specific issues.
- **Headteachers** can choose whether or not to be governors – the vast majority feel it is an important role to undertake.
- **Local authority (LA) governors** are appointed by the local authority that maintains the school – in our case West Sussex.
- **Foundation governors** in voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools only, are normally appointed by either the Diocese or the local church, or by some other foundation body.
- **Community governors** are appointed by the governing body. People who work at the school cannot be included in this category.
- **Sponsor governors** are appointed by the governing body. They include people who give substantial assistance to the school.

All of the above governors have equal status and rights.

- **Associate members** can be appointed by any committee established by the governing body and may be accorded voting rights on the committee but not the full governing body.



Individual governors have no power or responsibility except where the governing body has delegated a specific power to that individual. The strength of a governing body lies in its collective authority.

Governors work in a close and balanced partnership with the headteacher who, as the lead professional, has a duty to advise and assist the governing body to carry out its functions.

TERM OF OFFICE

Governing bodies decide on governors' term of office. It is usually four years. Governors can, of course, resign at any time but if you want to be an effective governor and provide stability and continuity to a school's governing body you should ideally commit to the term of office agreed by your governing body.

DISQUALIFICATION

Governors become disqualified:

- if they are subject to certain criminal convictions or become bankrupt;
- if, without the permission of the governing body, they fail to attend a full meeting of the governing body for six months from the date of the first meeting missed.

TIME OFF FROM WORK

Employers must give employees who are school governors 'reasonable time off' to carry out their duties – but they do not have to give time off with pay. The employer and employee should agree on what is 'reasonable time off'.

ALLOWANCES FOR EXPENSES

Governing bodies can pay their members' expenses for childcare, travel, telephone costs, stationery etc. Attendance allowance and loss of earnings cannot be paid. Governors should check if their particular governing body has agreed a policy for governors' expenses.

How Governing Bodies Work

All school governors need to know what their legal responsibilities are and how these fit in with the responsibilities of the headteacher, the local authority and the government. The most important thing to remember is that individual governors have no power or responsibility. It is only the full governing body which has legal duties and powers. Governors share in that corporate responsibility.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Governors hold public office and like all holders of public office they are under greater scrutiny than ever before for their decisions and actions. Providing that decisions are taken in good faith and in line with all the advice available, there should be no problems.



TAKING DECISIONS

Decisions are taken by a majority of the members present voting on a proposal. Once a decision has been taken, all governors are expected to respect it and keep to it, even if they did not support the final outcome. Any governor can ask for his or her opinion to be recorded in the minutes.

How individual governors vote, and opinions by governors involving a named person which are in any way sensitive or critical, should always be regarded as confidential. The governing body can decide whether an item under discussion is confidential in which case the minutes of that part of the meeting are recorded separately.

DECLARING A PERSONAL INTEREST

Individual governors must withdraw from a meeting if they are involved in a decision where their personal or financial interests may conflict with those of the school.

Checklist: Useful Information for New Governors

Most schools have appointed a link governor who should be able to provide the following information:

- list of members of the governing body, showing name, category of governor, date of appointment and (if agreed) telephone number;
- list of any committees and working parties, with membership and terms of reference;
- copy of the last set of minutes of a full governing body meeting;
- calendar of governing body meetings, school term and holiday dates, major school events for the current year;
- school development plan, or summary, if one exists;
- list of staff and their responsibilities;
- school prospectus;
- Self Evaluation Form (often referred to as the SEF);
- the school profile;
- latest inspection report by the Office for Standards in School (Ofsted);
- details of where to find key school policies;
- Church schools – information about the relevant Diocesan Authority.



Useful Contacts for Governors

If you wish to...	In the first instance...contact
Enquiries about courses in the programme	Mandy Sullivan Tel: 01243 642998 email: mandy.sullivan@westsussex.gov.uk
Book a place on a course or conference	Business Administration Unit Tel: 01243 382203 Fax: 01243 777894 email: cyps.learning@westsussex.gov.uk
Enquire about Briefings	Carol Barker Tel: 01293 423504 email: carol.barker@westsussex.gov.uk
Seek advice on appointment of governors	North: Helen Young Tel: 01293 423503 email: helen.young@westsussex.gov.uk
	South: Erica Fredericks/ Catherine Coombs Tel: 01903 839244/01903 839223 email: erica.fredericks@westsussex.gov.uk catherine.coombs@westsussex.gov.uk
Head of Leadership and Governance	Judith Ogan Tel: 01293 435647 Email: judith.ogan@westsussex.gov.uk

Leadership and Governance Support Officers	North East: Alan Wyncoll Tel: 01 293 423502 email: alan.wyncoll@westsussex.gov.uk
	North West: Carol Barker Tel: 01 293 423504 email: carol.barker@westsussex.gov.uk
	South East: Jackie Gatenby Tel: 01 903 839219 email: jackie.gatenby@westsussex.gov.uk
	South West: Tina Waugh Tel: 01 903 839840 email: tina.waugh@westsussex.gov.uk

DIOCESAN AUTHORITIES

Church of England – Jeremy Taylor, Diocesan Director of Education
Church House, 211 New Church Road, Hove, BN3 4ED.
Tel: 01273 421021.

Roman Catholic – Mary Reynolds, Director of Catholic Schools Service
4, Southgate Drive, Crawley, RH10 6BP.
Tel: 01293 511130

Useful Addresses

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Sanctuary Buildings

Great Smith Street

London SW1P 3BT

Tel: 0870 0012345

Publications: Tel: 0870 0002288, Email: dcsf@prolog.uk.com

Website: www.governomet.co.uk

Governorline

A helpline for governors

Tel: 08000 722181,

Website: www.governorline.info

Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)

Alexandra House

33 Kingsway

London WC2B 6SE

Tel: 0207 4216744

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

National Governors' Association (NGA)

29 Smallbrook Queensway

Birmingham B5 4HG

Tel: 0121 6435787

Website: www.nga.org.uk

West Sussex Governors' Association

Contact: Alan Wyncoll

Tel: 01293 423502

email: alan.wyncoll@westsussex.gov.uk

Governor Learning and Development

Governor learning and development takes place at several centres across the county. Induction courses for new governors take place in these centres every term.

The induction courses are:

1. Getting Started
2. Being Effective
3. Knowing Your School

Details of dates, times and venues can be found in the Handbook for Governors and Clerks which is sent to all governors.



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