

THE ROLE OF A SCHOOL GOVERNOR

This is an edited extract from Welcome to Governance 6th Edition, published by the National Governors' Association (NGA).

What does a governor do?

Role of a school governor is to contribute to the work of the governing body to ensure the highest standards of achievement for all children and young people in the school.

Expectations of the role

As a governor you are expected to:

- Have a real interest in education and developing positive outcomes for all children
- Get to know the school: its needs, strengths and areas for development
- Prepare for, and attend meetings (full governing body, committees and working groups)
- Actively contribute as a member of a team
- Speak, act and vote in the best interests of the school
- Use your personal and professional skills to support the school
- Respect all governing body decisions and to fully support them in public
- Act within the framework of the policies of the governing body and legal requirements
- Observe and follow the governing body's code of conduct and confidentiality requirements
- Commit to training and development opportunities

A governor is expected to contribute to the strategic discussions at governing body meetings which determine the following:

- The vision and ethos of the school
- Clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school
- That all children, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum
- The school's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation
- The school's staffing structure and key staffing policies
- The principles to be used by school leaders to set other school policies

A governor is expected to hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance; this includes:

- Agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan
- Considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of school performance
- Asking challenging questions of school leaders
- Ensuring senior leaders have arranged for the required audits to be carried out and receiving the results of those audits

- Ensuring senior leaders have developed the required policies and procedures and the school is operating effectively according to those policies
- Acting as a link governor on a specific issue, making relevant enquiries of the relevant staff, and reporting to the governing body on the progress on the relevant school priority
- Listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community, including local employers.

A governor should ensure the school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including the necessary expertise on business management. This includes external advice where necessary and effective appraisal and CPD (Continuing Professional Development). The staff should have both suitable premises and resources to fulfil their roles.

The role of governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role. This means that it is a strategic role, not an operational role in school.

A governor does NOT:

- Write school policies
- Undertake audits of any sort – whether financial or health & safety - even if the governor has the relevant professional experience
- Spend much time with the pupils of the school – if you want to work directly with children, there are many other voluntary valuable roles within the school
- Fundraise – this is the role of the PTA – the governing body should consider income streams and the potential for income generation, but not carry out fundraising tasks
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – the governing body monitors the quality of teaching in the school by analysing data from the senior staff and from external sources
- Do the job of the school staff – if there is not enough capacity within the paid staff team to carry out the necessary tasks, the governing body need to consider and rectify this.

As you become more experienced as a governor, there are other roles you could volunteer for which would increase your degree of involvement and level of responsibility (e.g as a chair of a committee).

Time commitment

Under usual circumstances, you should expect to spend between 10 and 20 days a year on your governing responsibilities; the top end of this commitment, which equates to about half a day per week in term time, is most relevant to the chair and others with key roles, such as chairs of committees. Initially, we would expect your commitment to be nearer 10 days a year. However, there may be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting a headteacher. Some longstanding governors may tell you that they spend far more time than this on school business; however, it is fairly common for governors to undertake additional volunteering roles over and above governance.

Your main task is to attend meetings and contribute to the work of the governing body. Meetings of the full governing body normally take place once or twice a term and each committee normally meets once a term but may meet more frequently depending on its remit and the school's circumstances. Each school is different in respect of their schedule of meetings. You should clarify with your governing body the time commitment required.

Under Section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, if you are employed, then you are entitled to 'reasonable time off' to undertake public duties; this includes school governance. 'Reasonable time off' is not defined in law, and you will need to negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed.

Expenses

Governors may receive out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of fulfilling their role as governor, your school's governing body should have such an expenses policy. Payments can cover incidental expenses, such as travel and childcare, but not loss of earnings.

Training

All governors are expected to undertake training to support them in their role. Each school has a budget which allows for this. Governors do not fund training from their own pocket. Your school may buy training and support for governors from a specific service provider, and they will provide detail of this to you if you join the governing body.

All new governors are strongly recommended to undertake face to face induction training within the first 6 months of becoming a governor. This will give you the opportunity to meet other new governors and clarify the role and responsibilities in more detail. Training will be organised for you through our governor service with Edsential and Eve Smith our current clerk to governors.

Other sources of information

Websites

Department for Education <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education>

School Governors One Stop Shop (SGOSS) <https://www.sgoss.org.uk/>

National Governors Association (NGA) <http://www.nga.org.uk/>

Inspiring Governors Alliance <http://www.inspiringgovernors.org/>

YouTube clips on the governor role

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hnm6BV5ft-8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GH8u5eOFjIE>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/sgossorg>