

# BRIEFING NOTES – SCHOOL/ACADEMY GOVERNORS

## **What are the roles and responsibilities of Governors?**

**(N.B. – In academies, Governors are also Directors/Trustees)**

Governors do not manage a school/academy day-to-day, but are required to oversee its long-term development. Ultimately, all governor responsibilities come back to this task and can be split into three core roles:

### Support & Challenge

- Asking the difficult questions and guaranteeing the school/academy is responsible for its actions.
- Using your skills and experience to support the school/academy in achieving its aims and recognising good performance.

### Strategic Management.

- Helping to set the school/academy aims and objectives
- Analysing performance outcomes
- Undertaking the Performance Management of the Headteacher/Principal

Essentially governors provide strategic leadership and accountability. Governors are responsible for the appointment of the Head/Principal and Deputy Head/Vice Principal. It is Governors who hold the main responsibility for finance in schools, and it is Governors who work with the Head/Principal to make the tough decisions about balancing resources.

## **Composition of Governing Bodies**

Not all Governing Bodies are the same. The composition of LA maintained school/academy Governing Bodies may, for example, be different from the composition of the Governing Body of an academy and 'faith' schools will in turn have a slightly different composition. Typically however a Governing Body will have the following categories of Governor:

- Parent Governors
- Staff Governors
- Local Authority Governors: nominated by the Local Authority;
- Co-opted Governors (previously known as Community Governors): members of the local community (appointed by the rest of the governing body);
- Foundation, Partnership and Sponsor Governors: representatives of any sponsoring bodies or faith groups

*Staff governors* (other than the Headteacher/Principal) are elected by the school/academy staff and must be paid to work at the school/academy, by the school/academy (that is, not under an external contract such as catering or cleaning).

*Parent governors* can either be elected by parents of children at the school, or if insufficient numbers are elected, can be appointed by the governing body to fill any remaining vacancies.

By law, governing bodies meet at least three times every year, as a *Full Governing Body*, where the ongoing business of committees, the governing body and the school/academy are discussed, reported on and where decisions are taken by a majority vote.

### **Recruitment, retention, reward and time commitment of Governors.**

Governor vacancies reduce the effectiveness of Governing Bodies because they limit the range of experience available to the school/academy and increase the workload of other governors.

Schools/Academies serve their local community and it is therefore important that the Governing Body reflects that community. The school/academy and its community will be better served where the governors bring the perspective of the community to their decision-making and where the community feel connected to the school/academy through the Governing Body.

Vacancies result in the relevant stakeholder group being under-represented and this, in turn, disturbs the balance between the groups.

The time commitment is not usually excessive, though the responsibilities of a school/academy governor can be considerable. The list below suggests a typical work load:

- 1 governing body meeting per term
- 1 or 2 meetings per term for each committee (e.g. finance, curriculum, personnel, property) on which the governor is a member
- At least 1 visit per year to school/academy during the day
- Possible involvement with staff selection, pupil exclusion reviews or staff dismissal cases
- Reading of agenda and other papers for meetings;
- At least 1 training session per year, often these are held during the evening.

Governors are able to claim expenses for such things as travel to and from the meetings or training sessions and childcare incurred during meetings, if their governing body approves this.

Most meetings are during the evenings. The Law says that an employer must give an employee "reasonable" time off work for governor business, but pay is at the employer's discretion. Many employers actively encourage their people to become governors because it provides new experience and skills which are useful in many jobs.

### **Induction requirements and programmes for Governors.**

It is essential for all new governors to receive a comprehensive induction package covering a broad range of issues and topics.

The Induction Package should cover the following:

#### **PURPOSE**

- To welcome new governors to the Governing Body and enable them to meet other members
- To encourage new governors to visit the school/academy to experience its atmosphere and understand its ethos
- To meet the Headteacher/Principal, staff and children

- To explain the partnership between the Headteacher/Principal, school/academy and Governing Body
- To explain the role and responsibilities of governors
- To give background material on the school/academy and current issues
- To allow new governors to ask questions about their role and/or the school/academy
- To explain how the Governing Body and its committees work
- To allow new governors to join the committee(s) of their choice

New governors will:

- Be welcomed to the Governing Body by the Chair
- Be invited by the Headteacher/Principal to visit the school/academy
- Have the opportunity to tour the school/academy and meet staff and children
- Receive an informal briefing on the school/academy from the Headteacher/Principal
- Have the opportunity to meet informally with an existing governor who will then act as their mentor
- Be accompanied by their mentor to their first full Governing Body meeting (if required)
- Have the opportunity to review their first meeting with the mentor

New governors will receive:

- A comprehensive package of documentation including a 'Guide to the Law for Governors'

New governors are also recommended to read:

- The School Improvement Plan
- The latest Ofsted report and action plan
- Policy documents relevant to committee membership
- The latest Annual Report to parents
- The monitoring performance and evaluation policy

**On-going training and development requirements for Governors.**

High quality induction and continual professional development is vital to equip governors with the skills they need.

Good Governing Bodies set out clearly what they expect of their governors, particularly when they first join the governing body. It is an explicit requirement that all appointed governors have the skills required to contribute to effective governance and the success of the school/academy.

It is Governing Bodies' responsibility to identify and secure the induction and other ongoing training and development governors need. Governing bodies should set aside a budget for this purpose.

Governing bodies should consider giving the vice-chair or another governor a specific responsibility for ensuring every governor develops the skills they need to be effective.

**How the performance of Governors is assessed, by whom, how frequently and against what.**

A key part of the role Chair of Governors is to build a cohesive team of governors, delegating tasks across the Governing Body so that all members contribute, share responsibility for the overall workload and feel that their individual skills, knowledge and experience are well used.

Good Chairs of Governors set out clearly what they expect of their governors and ensure that governors' skills are regularly audited. Having identified the skills, knowledge and experience of your governors, you should ensure that any gaps are filled through training and recruitment. It is important to ensure that the governing body continues to attract and retain good governors, including governors with specialist experience as necessary.

Good team working means that there should be clear, open and honest communication between governors at all times. Governing bodies should also undertake periodic reviews of their own effectiveness, measured against the Ofsted criteria for effective governance.

### **Whom the Governors represent and how that role should be fulfilled.**

Key responsibilities of the governing body include ensuring the clarity, vision and strategic direction of the school/academy, holding senior leaders to account, and ensuring that the school/academy achieves the aims and ambitions it has for its pupils.

The work that they do has the ability to transform a school/academy and the lives of the children in it. It is important therefore that governors understand that their role is strategic rather than operational. Governors set the school/academy's strategic framework and ensure that it meets all of its statutory duties.

They should not be drawn into direct involvement in operational matters and the detail of the day-to-day management of the school/academy, which are the responsibility of the Headteacher/Principal and senior leaders.

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out 10 key questions that it recommends governors ask to better understand and challenge their school/academy's performance:

1. What are the school/academy's values? Are they reflected in our long-term development plans?
2. How are we going to raise standards for all children, including the most and least able, those with special educational needs, boys and girls, and any who are currently underachieving?
3. Have we got the right staff and the right development and reward arrangements?
4. Do we have a sound financial strategy, get good value for money and have robust procurement and financial systems?
5. Do we keep our buildings and other assets in good condition and are they well used?
6. How well does the curriculum provide for and stretch all pupils?
7. How well do we keep parents informed and take account of their views?
8. Do we keep children safe and meet statutory health and safety and safeguarding requirements?
9. How is pupil behaviour and attendance? Do we tackle the root causes of poor behaviour?
10. Do we offer a wide range of extra-curricular activities which engage all pupils?

### **How and to what extent Ofsted evaluates the performance and capacity of Governance and the criteria it uses.**

Under Ofsted's Common Inspection Framework which will be in force from September 2015, governance is evaluated as part of leadership and management. There is not a separate judgement for governance.

Part of the framework says that when making a judgement on the effectiveness of leadership and management, inspectors will evaluate the extent to which leaders, managers and governors:

- Demonstrate an ambitious vision, have high expectations for what all children and learners can achieve and ensure high standards of provision and care for children and learners.
- Improve staff practice, teaching, learning and assessment through rigorous performance management and appropriate professional development.
- Evaluate the quality of the provision and outcomes through robust self-assessment, taking account of users' views, and use the findings to develop capacity for sustainable improvement.
- Provide learning programmes or a curriculum that have suitable breadth, depth and relevance so that they meet any relevant statutory requirements, as well as the needs and interests of children, learners and employers, nationally and in the local community.
- Successfully plan and manage learning programmes, the curriculum and careers advice so that all children and learners get a good start and are well prepared for the next stage in their education, training or employment.
- Actively promote equality and diversity, tackle bullying and discrimination and narrow any gaps in achievement between different groups of children and learners.
- Actively promote British values.
- Make sure that safeguarding arrangements to protect children, young people and learners meet all statutory and other government requirements, promote their welfare and prevent radicalisation and extremism.

It further explains that inspectors will consider:

- The leaders' and governors' vision and ambition for the school/academy and how these are communicated to staff, parents and pupils.
- How effectively leaders use the PE and sport premium and measure its impact on outcomes for pupils, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.
- How effectively leaders and governors track the progress of groups of pupils to ensure that none falls behind and underachieve, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.
- How effectively leaders use additional funding, including the pupil premium, and measure its impact on outcomes for pupils, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this.
- The effectiveness of governors in discharging their core statutory functions.

### **Should there be Government guidance on all of the above?**

There is Government guidance via The Governors' Handbook,

Leading governors: The role of the chair of governors in schools and academies, Governor Development Service (GDS), A Guide to the Law for School Governors, Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion, etc. - all of which are reviewed and updated frequently.

However, in most cases there cannot be many hard and fast rules, (apart from the guidelines of the responsibility to uphold the law) simply general guidelines as so many factors alter according to local influences, especially the needs of the community and key stakeholders.

It is essential that these general guidelines do point the way to good governance as the alternative is to never have progress in the most important endeavour of a young person's life.

#### References:

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