



Becoming a School Governor

Guidance for Potential Governors



School Governors

School governors are volunteers who want to make a positive contribution to children's education. They do not need to be education experts or have formal qualifications.

The most effective governors are those who:

- listen, think and ask questions;
- believe that education is important;
- take an interest in the role of schools in the community;
- can work with others and assimilate a wide range of information and data;
- have a willingness to learn;
- have sound communication skills;
- are prepared to give time to doing the job well.

A governor performs a vital strategic role as part of a governing body.

Governors need to make time to:

- attend full governing body meetings, usually twice a term;
- attend committee and working party meetings about once or twice a term;
- attend school events;
- read reports and background papers before meetings;
- visit the school during the working day;
- take part, if necessary, in staff appointment panels, pupil exclusion panels, complaints panels and staff discipline and grievance hearings; and
- attend training.

The governing board:

- Individual governors have no power or responsibility. It is only the full governing body that has legal duties and powers. However, all governors share in that corporate responsibility;
- The school's direction is agreed by the governing board, headteacher and senior leadership team, who also make sure the school is meeting its targets;
- The headteacher and staff manage the school on a day-to-day basis.

The purpose of governance is to provide confident and strong strategic leadership which leads to robust accountability, oversight and assurance for educational and financial performance.

All governance boards, no matter what type of school or how many schools they govern, have three core functions:

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

Schools are looking for governors. People with the right skills, experience, qualities and capacity who:

- understand the purpose of governance and the role of non-executive leadership and have all the necessary skills, as outlined in the department's *Competency frameworks: for governance and professional clerking*, to deliver it well;
- include an effective chair and vice-chair with the ability to provide visionary strategic non-executive leadership;
- provide sufficient diversity of perspectives to enable robust decision making;
- are recruited through robust and transparent processes against a clear articulation of required skills which are set out in a role specification;
- use active succession planning to ensure the board, and the whole organisation, continues to have the people and leadership it needs to remain effective; and
- employ a professional clerk, and as necessary a company secretary, to provide expert advice and guidance and to ensure the efficient and compliant operation of the board.

Taken from Governance Handbook March 2019

The clerk to the governing board

Every governing board is required by law to have a clerk. The clerk is accountable to the governing board, working effectively with the chair of governors, the headteacher and other governors. Having a highly effective clerk supporting any governing board is key to contributing to overall success and effectiveness in driving school improvement.

The role of the clerk has never been as key to the work of the governing board as it is now. Headteachers and governing boards recognise the role the clerk plays and support them with professional development. The main purpose of the role of clerk is to provide administrative support to the governing board, together with advice and guidance on governance, powers, constitutional and procedural matters. They work within the current legislative framework, securing the continuity of governing board business and observing confidentiality requirements.

The clerk is employed by the governing board to fulfil the following main responsibilities and tasks:

Effective administration of meetings including:

- Preparing a focused agenda for governing board meetings (and meetings of committees where required);
- Ensuring papers are available and distributed on time;
- Ensuring meetings are quorate;
- Keeping a record of meeting attendance and apologies;
- Drafting governing body minutes;
- Circulating minutes to all governors and other relevant bodies as agreed;
- Following up action points when required.

Providing advice to the governing board:

- Acting as first point of contact for governor queries;
- Advising the governing body on legislation and procedural matters where necessary and knowing where to seek advice;
- Ensuring statutory policies are in place and reviewed as necessary;
- Sending new governors induction materials, ensuring
- they have access to appropriate documents.

Membership tasks:

- Keeping a record of governing board membership and terms of office;
- Advising governors and appointing bodies in advance of terms of office expiring;
- Maintaining a register of business and pecuniary interests;

- Ensuring DBS checks are carried out on all new governors within the required timeframe;
- Maintaining a record of training undertaken by governors;
- Maintaining attendance records and advising the chair of potential disqualification through lack of attendance.

Managing Information:

- Maintaining up to date records of names, addresses, terms of office and categories of governing body members;
- Maintaining terms of reference for committees and ensuring these are reviewed annually;
- Ensuring signed minutes are filed in school.

What else does the clerk do?

- The clerk may be required to provide administrative support to exclusion and appeals committees and complaints panels.
- Clerks often assist with election procedures for parent and staff governors;
- Other tasks as determined by the governing board from time to time.

Quotes received from current West Sussex governors

- “Privileged position to help shape the lives of young people.”
- “Great satisfaction in knowing I am contributing to the education of our future generation in a positive way.”
- “Making a difference for all the children in our community – not just in our school.”
- “It’s great to be part of a team and see what happens behind the scenes at school.”
- “Valuing education as I do, it is so nice to be able to play a pivotal part in decision making that will provide benefits to both individuals and the community as a whole.”
- “In investing in the education, ethos and vision of a school you can be looking at the future of our society in terms of values and social cohesion.”
- “It’s great to feel that your efforts in supporting and directing the leadership of the school has a material impact on future good citizens. Not just academically but in social development terms.”
- “You are not alone! There is a really good support team at County to help you with queries.”

Links and contact details

To find out more about the role of the school governor further information can be found at:

Governance Handbook:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

West Sussex Services for Schools:

<http://schools.westsussex.gov.uk/Services/3164>

If you are interested in becoming a school governor you could either contact a school directly or please email: governor.services@westsussex.gov.uk

or phone the West Sussex governance team on 0330 222 8887.

Contact details for further information

Jackie Gatenby/Ruth Marsella
School Support Officers

Email: jackie.gatenby@westsussex.gov.uk
Ruth.marsella@westsussex.gov.uk

Tel. 033022 24080/24205

Please note that the details within this booklet were correct at date of publication.