

Help schools help children



What's missing is a School Governor

As a School Governor, you'll be part of a team. You'll agree the school's budget, covering everything from computers to chemistry benches. You'll decide on the key issues which will help teachers to raise standards and to shape the future of the school. You don't need qualifications, just the desire to make a difference and a couple of spare evenings a month.

A good governing body is vital to a school's success. But why?

- Governors make key decisions like appointing the head teacher.
- Governors' decisions directly affect the education and well-being of children.
- Governors can really make a difference in improving standards throughout a school.

Who can be a governor?

Anybody over 18, with a few exceptions.

'Being on the governing body means I have the opportunity to help youngsters achieve their goals and ambitions. We make sure that staff have the right tools to broaden the children's knowledge and widen their horizons. In essence it's about making things better.'

Paul Murray

Foundation Governor

What will I get out of being a school governor?

- The knowledge that you have played a part in improving children's education and supported the school's staff.
- A chance to develop new skills and to practise existing ones, such as chairing meetings, speaking in groups, asking questions, making suggestions and appointing staff.
- A chance to help other members of the team, perhaps because they are new, are not used to committee work or need help in learning about the school and about school governance.

'Governors feel a sense of pride. The role opens your eyes to things and it's an interesting experience to work with different people to make things happen.'

Ann Read

Head Teacher of
Mill Vale Middle School
Dunstable

Do I need qualifications to be a school governor?

No. Schools need volunteers (whether parents or not) with experience of life, but some governors may have qualifications or professional skills.

I work full-time. Will I still have time to be a school governor?

- Many school governors are in full-time work. But governors' meetings can take place during the working day and, very often, during the evenings.
- Check carefully the number of meetings you would be expected to attend and when they usually take place. Also bear in mind that you might want to spend time getting to know the school in other ways and joining its activities.

School governors in action

Mary Reeve



I started at the infant school of my eldest daughter and am now at St Thomas More Boys Secondary School in Westcliff-on-Sea, which my son attends.

Being a governor is a way of having input into the future of the school and making sure it knows what parents think. But the time commitment can be demanding, with so many areas to cover such as finance, staffing and sex education.

It is useful if governors have particular skills, but they certainly don't need them before they join. The main thing is that it's great to be a part of what's happening. As Link Governor, I work with the local authority to organise training. This helps new governors find their feet and provides updates for experienced ones.

Governors work as a team, often from varied backgrounds. One of ours is in finance, another is a police officer. I'm in the road haulage business. /

What makes a good school governor?

- You care about improving children's educational attainment.
- You want to contribute to the local community.
- You want to work as part of a team and can value the contribution made by different people.
- You accept you might need training.
- You are willing to ask questions.
- You are open to ideas and willing to learn.

What can I offer?

- Enthusiasm and commitment.
- If you are a parent, your own understanding of other parents' concerns, but you don't need to be a parent to be a good school governor.
- Whether you are a parent or not, as a member of the school's community your local knowledge will be valuable: you will have a feel for what is important to people.
- If you happen to have business or other skills, schools might find these particularly helpful.

School governors in action

Sajid Lunat

My son started school in January so I stood for parent governor because I wanted to get involved as much as possible in the school that is providing his education. I wanted to represent all parents in the decision-making process but also 25 per cent of the pupils at the school, St John's Infant School in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire, are Asian and there was no Asian parent governor.

It is a demanding role but it depends how much you want to get involved. A parent governor is no different to the other governors. You find people think you have to be a professional to get really involved but that isn't the case. The only real difference is the daily contact you have with the school as a parent. You are able to speak with children and other parents to get feedback.

The personal satisfaction I get is making a contribution towards improving the school and making sure that the viewpoint of Asian pupils is not missed. I think my point of view is useful to the school.

In my job as an outreach worker, putting across to the community that we need more Asian and Afro-Caribbean governors, I find that people are surprised that the role of parent governor is so important. I'm also involved in the West Yorkshire Black Governors Support Service which helps to support and train people from ethnic groups who are school governors.



What do school governors do?

School governors:

- promote high standards of educational attainment;
- set targets for pupil achievement;
- take general responsibility for the conduct of the school;
- manage the school's budget, including deciding how many staff will work there and their pay;
- make sure that the curriculum is balanced and broadly based, in particular that the National Curriculum and religious education are taught, and report on pupils' achievement in National Curriculum assessments and examination results;
- participate in the appointment of senior staff (including appointing the head teacher) and regulate staff conduct and discipline; and
- draw up an action plan after an inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED).

School governors in action

Edith Carey

I have been a school governor for over 20 years, first as a parent governor and now as a local authority governor at two schools in the Southend area: Earls Infant School and Belfairs High School.

I became involved to provide a parents' voice but also to have some sense of community input. I had no professional experience in areas such as accountancy or personnel management but still had plenty to give. I cast myself in the role of asking obvious questions because you can have expert accountants but we need people to ask the type of question that parents might ask.

I work as a road safety officer as well as acting as a governor. Being a governor is time consuming. It involves at least one meeting a term plus a meeting for each of the five committees I'm on each term. You don't have to be an education expert but you do have a responsibility to understand the curriculum.

Help and training are available. I have taken a BTEC advanced course in school governance that was based on my experience as a governor. Training for governors includes courses on the curriculum, personnel, finance and interviewing.

The opportunity to progress is open to all. I once served as chair of governors at Earls Infant School. Twenty years ago it was a case of turning up once a month and asking why the boys' toilets weren't working but now it's much more challenging.



Who sits on a governing body?

Governing bodies are made up of:

- parents elected by other parents with children at the school;
- the head teacher, if the head teacher chooses to be;
- teachers elected by other teachers;
- non-teaching staff elected by other non-teaching staff;
- people appointed by the local education authority;
- people chosen by governors from the local community; and
- in church and some other types of school, people appointed by the church or foundation.

How does a governing body work?

A governing body:

- works closely with the head teacher;
- makes decisions collectively as a team;
- often delegates decision making to committees or to individuals, for example, to the head teacher; and
- conducts most of its business through meetings, making use of relevant papers and guidance, and advice from the head teacher.

School governors in action

Mark Jenkins



I have been a parent governor for a year at Eastcote Primary School in the London Borough of Bexley. My two children, five and eight years old, attend the school. It seemed the ideal opportunity to put something back. It's a good school and I want to help maintain this standard.

I put myself forward for election because I thought I could contribute something by using my business experience. I have worked for 17 years in IT and thought this might help the school.

I have been impressed with the school-funded support and training provided. Basic training involved one three-hour session in the evening and there are other courses available.

For the first year I've been serving on the curriculum committee to find my feet. I was surprised that the workload was not as much as I had expected. We have a full meeting once a term and the committee also meets once a term, both in the evenings.

You are encouraged to progress, but personally I couldn't spare the time to act as chairperson. It is important to have parents on the governing body.

How much time does it take?

Governors act as a team and, as such, the amount of time that each of them can give to the role will vary. Some people will be able and willing to give a lot throughout their time as a governor. Others will find that the amount of time they can give increases or reduces during that period. But if you are serious about helping your school to help children, then you do need to:

- be willing to prepare for meetings: there can be a lot of papers to read;
- attend meetings: the governing body must meet at least once a term, but you probably will be asked to serve on at least one committee. How often this meets will vary, but it is not unusual for one committee to meet each half-term;

- be able to get to meetings which, quite often, will be during the evening but which may be early or during the day (see below on the reimbursement of expenses);
- participate. If you cannot prepare for, and attend, meetings you will not be able to help the school effectively.

But what if I incur costs, like childcare?

Governing bodies are allowed to refund costs, for example, the cost of a carer for dependent relatives while you attend meetings.

School governors in action

Carol Dadswell



It is important that people interested in becoming a governor realise there is a time commitment. You mustn't be misled into thinking that you just turn up to two meetings a term. More commitment is needed to play an effective role. Work is divided across committees and governors should also spend time visiting the school and being kept informed.

Individual governors don't have separate powers. You work as a team with different strengths so it is important to share and distribute the work to people's personal strengths.

You need to go in with a positive attitude of wanting to help the school but must be willing to hold the school to account and ask some questions. Most local authorities will provide very good basic training and most schools have a training policy.

It's a rewarding role because you can affect the quality of education provided, giving young people greater opportunities. The biggest decision a school governor might face, and your most important job, is the appointment of the head teacher. This can really make or break the school. /

I first became involved in the early 1980s as a parent governor at the Hampden Park Secondary School in Eastbourne. I am now an LEA governor at Hampden Park and am chair of governors at The Haven Voluntary Aided Primary School. My day job is working as a school governor adviser.

I became a governor because I had an interest in education and wanted to give something to the school that provided education to my son. I also wanted to give some time to my own community.

How do I become a school governor?

You can become a school governor by:

- being elected by parents as a parent governor, if your child attends the school;
- being elected by the teaching or non-teaching staff, if you are a member of the teaching or non-teaching staff;
- being appointed by the local education authority;
- being appointed by the church or charitable trust; or by
- being co-opted (that is, appointed) by the other governors.

To become a governor, you will need to ensure that those who have a vote, or who appoint people, know about your interest.

- Schools organise elections and tell parents and staff about them. But you can always ask a school whether there are vacancies now that need to be filled.
- You can approach a school to see whether they might co-opt you.
- You can ask the local education authority, church or foundation if they would appoint you.

What if my employer won't give me time off?

Employment law gives people the right to reasonable unpaid time off and some employers give paid leave for school governor duties.

Many employers actually encourage their staff to become school governors. They realise that the skills gained through being a school governor are transferable to the workplace.

School governors in action

David Heginbotham

I became involved as a local authority governor 12 years ago. As a Burnley Borough councillor I was co-opted onto the governing body of Worsthorne Primary School, a small village on the outskirts of Burnley.

I got involved because it comes from the heart. You have to do it because you enjoy being a governor. It's great watching the kids go through the school. The only problem I have is there is a limit to the amount of time I can give because of my council duties and the antique business I run.

Some children do have problems so we discuss with the head teacher how this can be resolved. It's good to be able to change things to give children every chance.

The governing body is a group effort. We have formed a good team over the years but we do lose people. We have a good cross-section of governors from all walks of life.

I find it an exciting role, it can be exhilarating. I'd like to spend more time at the school but other governors get involved in different ways. /



Finding out more

There are a number of sources of information if you want to find out more about being a school governor. These include the local education authority and local schools. And there are several national organisations that may be able to help. Details are opposite.

School Governor Recruitment and Retention Team

Department for Education and Employment
Sanctuary Buildings, Area 3C
Great Smith Street
London SW1P 3BT

Telephone: (020) 7925 6060

Fax: (020) 7925 5022

E-mail: gov.recruit@dfee.gov.uk

Website:

www.dfee.gov.uk/governor/index.htm

Advisory Centre for Education (ACE) Limited

Department A
Unit 1C, Aberdeen Studios
22 Highbury Grove
London N5 2DQ

Telephone: (020) 7354 8318

Fax: (020) 7354 9069

E-mail: ace-ed@easynet.co.uk

Website: www.ace-ed.org.uk

Information for School and College Governors

Avondale Park School
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E-mail: iscg@governors.fsnet.co.uk

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