

Our helpline number: 01743 254361

Governor Support and Development Service
Children and Young People's Services Directorate
The Guildhall
Frankwell Quay
Shrewsbury
SY3 8HQ

Our email address:

governor-support@shropshire.gov.uk
(substitute 'governor-support' for the named person
in the service in lower case, ie sue.round)

National Governors' Association (NGA) - www.nga.org.uk
Teachernet - www.teachernet.gov.uk Teachers' TV - www.teachers.tv
DCSF - www.dcsf.gov.uk
DCSF governors' website - www.governornet.co.uk
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Governor Support and Development Service



The Role and
Responsibilities of
School Governors



We have school governors because, in our democratic society, it is important that people from the local community have a say in the way state schools are run, what is taught, and how the education children receive is planned and delivered. This is because a large percentage of local taxes are dedicated to the “state education system”. School governors ensure that local representatives help decide how public money is spent.

In 1988 Parliament decided that the money allocated to each local authority for its schools would be best used if it was given directly to each school. At this time Local Management of Schools (LMS) was introduced. Once this step was taken it was agreed that governors would oversee the spending of school budgets. Governors work together as a ‘corporate body’ or governing body that is accountable for the standards, performance, financial management and planned developments of a school, operating within a clear Legal framework.

It is important to remember that school governors are unpaid. The vast majority of them are public-spirited people who agree to stand for the office because they want to play a valuable role in the community.

Furthermore, most governors have considerable life experience, and many have professional experience, both of which can be a real asset to the school.

Governors give their time freely, in every sense of the word; their responsibilities are many, and are a considerable drain on their time; they support the school, and the staff who work within the school. The main aim of the governing body is to ensure that their school provides the best possible education for its pupils, which is no different from the aim of the staff of the school.

A good school will be one where staff, governors and parents all work together for the benefit of the pupils.



Governors have three main roles:

The strategic role - thinking and working strategically to help raise standards. This means, for example, approving the School Development Plan (SDP), approving all school policies, approving targets, approving the school budget, approving the school self evaluation process and forms, approving the school prospectus.

The role of 'critical friend' - monitoring and evaluating progress towards the school's priorities and targets, and supporting the head and staff as well as challenging their expectations. This means that governors should always support the headteacher but at the same time, they should view what is happening in school as an objective and disinterested party, and that their view should be underpinned by the desire to bring about school improvement.

To fulfil this role, governors need to have a complete awareness of school life, and to monitor what is going on in school. They need to be confident that the policies are being applied, and that progress is being made towards achieving the priority areas for improvement, which are specified in the SDP.

Probably, an individual governor will be required to take a special interest in a particular curriculum area, or perhaps a whole-school issues (eg Special Educational Needs). Some governors are more able to visit the school, in this capacity, than others. They are not inspecting the teachers, but monitoring eg finding out. After a classroom visit governors are invariably impressed by what they see. Most have no idea of the extent of planning, and the implications of classroom management, so the whole experience is, for them, a learning experience.

The role of ensuring accountability - the headteacher is accountable to governors and the governing body is accountable to all "stakeholders". The headteacher is required to explain, professionally, why a certain area is considered a priority area for improvement, or why a certain sum of money should be allocated in a certain way. Governors should hold the headteacher to account by asking probing questions, so that they fully understand. The governors, in turn, have a duty to explain school strategy to parents, and, if OFSTED decides to call, to the inspectors. Governors are accountable particularly to the parents, and to OFSTED, although they are also accountable to all members of the school community.

The governing body of a school represents the local community, and the school community. In some schools (for example in Church schools) the governing body also represents the interests of the particular school.

There are different types of school governor. Some governors are appointed. Local Authority governors are appointed by the local Councillor, and in Church schools, Foundation governors are appointed by the Diocese. Other governors will be elected. This is the case for the parent governors, and the staff governors. The majority of governing bodies may co-opt governors from the local community. Such governors are called community governors and may be members of the Parish Council, or other members of the local community whom the governing body perceives to be increasing its expertise (people trained in finance, human resource management or health and safety, for example).

In addition, every school has at least one ex officio governor ie this person is automatically entitled to be a governor, because of his/her job. This is why the headteacher of a school is invariably a member of the governing body. In the case of Church schools, the local vicar will also have this automatic entitlement.



School governors are primarily in post to help bring about school improvement. Governors review the academic results of their school and compare them to those of similar schools. Having identified any areas of weakness, they approve strategies to redress these. They formally approve the targets to bring about improvement.

An effective governing body will play an important part of life in the school.

Governors share the leadership of the school with the headteacher and the senior management team (SMT). Governors are responsible for the strategic management of the school. This involves approving the School Development Plan, all school policies, the targets, and the school prospectus.

They should be fully aware of every aspect of school life, although, since they are not educationalists, they are required to know the 'big picture' rather than the minutiae of school life.



Some governors do have experience of education. But this is incidental. The principle of school governance is that local representatives, from a variety of walks of life, will be involved in the local school. Governors require guidance from an experienced educationalist. This person is the headteacher of the school. An effective governing body will always seek guidance from its headteacher.

The headteacher has been appointed by the governors, as the person who best reflects their aspirations for the school. This does not deny them of their right to discuss the best way forward for the school.

An effective governing body will always remember that they should ask questions of the headteacher, so that, together, they can determine the best line of action for their school.

