

# ***A guide for Prospective School Governors***

*What boards of governors do and what being a governor involves*



## ***Working together – Providing Opportunities***



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### Introduction

If you are reading this guidance then it is possible that you are thinking about become a governor in a maintained school or academy in Somerset.

It will be an important decision for you to make and one that you will need to consider very carefully as the role is demanding but at the same time rewarding and extremely important to bettering the outcomes for the young people in Somerset.

Enthusiastic and committed people are needed to volunteer to one of the largest volunteer forces in the country and you will have an important role to play in raising school standards. You will be a person who will want to make a positive contribution to children and young people's education.

Although the role of governor is subject to qualification and disqualification regulations (further information is contained in a separate document on the service website, [www.governorservices.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.governorservices.somerset.gov.uk) in the becoming a governor file) this guidance document is intended to give you an understanding of the role and time commitment to help inform your decision.

## Why do schools have boards of governors?

Board of governors (also known as governing bodies) are responsible for the conduct of the school and they are the body who are accountable for ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in their school.

For maintained schools this will be reflected in legislation and for Academies within their funding agreements and articles of association as well as relevant legislation.

The government has high expectations of boards of governors and that as an individual governor who is part of the corporate body you will have a strong focus on 3 core strategic functions:

1. Setting the school's/academy's vision, ethos and strategic direction;
2. Holding the headteacher/principal to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure that its money is well spent.

These functions underpin the criteria that Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education) use to judge the effectiveness of governors in maintained schools and academies.

*“The role of the board is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role”*  
(NGA – National Governors Association – Welcome to Governance)

It is the headteacher's responsibility to manage and control the school underpinned and supported by the strategic framework established by the board.

Governors are recruited to deliver the board's core functions effectively based on their skills, expertise and knowledge.

## Role of the Governor

Each individual governor is a member of a body that is established in law as a corporate body. Individual governors may not act independently of the rest of the governing board and the board's formal work and decision-making is dealt with at meetings.

As a governor you are part of the team that has a strategic role, fulfilling the 3 core functions and with the expectation of:-

1. Contributing to the strategic discussions at board meetings which determine:
  - The vision and ethos of the school;
  - Clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school;
  - That all pupils/students, 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.
2. Holding the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance, including:
  - Agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan;
  - Consider 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.
3. Ensuring school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including any necessary CPD (Continuing Professional Development) and that the way in which those resources are used has impact on educational outcomes.
4. When required, serve on panels of governors to:
  - Appoint the headteacher and other senior leaders;
  - Appraise the headteacher;
  - Consider pupil exclusions;
  - Sit on a final stage complaints hearing.

## Expectation and Time Commitment

Most boards of governors have adopted a written code of conduct so that all governors know what is expected of them. The code of conduct includes the following principles and that all governors should:

- Have the well-being and success of the school as their central concern;
- Act fairly and without prejudice at all times;
- Understand that all governors have equal status;
- Appreciate that in general no governor has individual power (there are certain exceptions);
- Be actively involved in the work of the board of governors and accept a fair share of responsibility;
- Make every effort to attend meetings and participate in the meetings. They should prepare for meetings by reading papers and thinking about agenda items. They must accept decisions made by the majority;
- Work in partnership with the headteacher and staff;
- Understand and balance their own strategic role with the headteacher's responsibility for the implementation of policy and the day-to-day management of the school;
- Make the effort to get to know the school and its staff, pupils and parents. This involves supporting the school's activities. It also involves first hand experience of pupils' learning, through a 'governors in school' policy agreed by staff and the board of governors;
- Ensure that matters discussed in meetings that are deemed 'confidential' are not discussed outside the meeting;
- Know and comply with the procedures adopted by the board of governors for dealing with criticisms and complaints.

Being an effective governor does mean promising to commit some time to the role. As well as attending meetings you will need to develop your knowledge and understanding of the work of the board and school; this will mean visiting the school to get to know it, preferably during the working day.

Initially the expectation is that your commitment would be at least 10 days per year attending board meetings and undertaking visits to school plus any further reading in preparation for meetings. However, this could increase up to at least 20 days per year (approximately ½ day a week in term time) if you become the chair of governors or chair of a committee. There will be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting and appointing a headteacher.

## Support for Governors

### Support from Governor Services

We work in partnership with dioceses, schools and academies to support boards of governors by providing:–

- Information, advice and guidance on governance roles and procedures by telephone and email
- A comprehensive training and development programme, including induction
- Network magazine – a termly magazine published 3 times a year
- Access to our service website [www.governorservices.somerset.gov.uk](http://www.governorservices.somerset.gov.uk)

### Support from your school

Every school should have an induction programme for its new governors when their appointment has been confirmed. A tour of the site will be particularly helpful if you are not already involved with the life of the school.

Governor Allowances - Every board of governors must have a protocol/policy on whether or not to pay allowances to governors. Expenses may cover the cost of child-minding or looking after a dependant relative during board of governors meetings. Travelling expenses to attend board of governors meetings are not generally paid but may be paid, in line with HMRC guidelines, if a governor has to travel elsewhere on behalf of the board of governors.

### Support from your employer

Under section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996, if you are employed then you are entitled to “reasonable time off” to undertake governance duties. However, the law does not state what “reasonable time off” is and you will need to negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed and whether or not this is with pay, or you will use holiday or time off in lieu

Most board of governor meetings will be held in the evening so this shouldn't necessarily affect your working life but there is an expectation that you might be required to attend school during the day in regard to:-

- Make a governor visit to meet either a member of staff or to visit a classroom;
- Attend a school assembly or function;
- Be part of a recruitment/appointment panel of staff or even a headteacher.

## What to do next

If after reading the above you feel that you might have the right level of expertise, skills, knowledge and more importantly feel that you are able to commit to the time required there are 2 ways to find out about vacancies in your area:-

- Contact schools in your area direct - they will let you know of any current vacancies that they have that you might be eligible for. If you are a parent of a child at the school you will be informed, along with other parents, of any vacancies for parent governor.
- Contact Governor Services – if you don't have a specific school in mind or have further questions then contact the governor services team –

Somerset Governor Services  
County Hall  
Taunton  
TA1 4DY

Phone – 01823 355757 or 01823 357012

Email – [sgs@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:sgs@somerset.gov.uk)