



## **Governors' Handbook**

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## Welcome

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Welcome to Acorns School. We are sure you will be a valuable member and we are looking forward to working with you and utilising your varied skills and interests

Within this Handbook you will find the majority of initial information you may need. In addition, please feel free to call upon another member of the team for assistance. This Handbook is intended to ease you into your new role of Governor and assist you in learning about our school and becoming involved in the essential decision making.

Before a meeting you will receive paperwork from Governor Services. This will allow you to have some idea of what will be discussed at the meeting. There is a chance to meet other governors before the meeting and to start to feel at ease.

Please don't feel at all pressured into volunteering for anything which the Governing Body asks. Everyone needs time to get to grips with the role and to get to know the other team members.

It is also important to know that there is always someone to help you; someone to hear your thoughts before or after any meeting, or indeed at any time at all. All you need to do is send an email, or pick up the phone.

Each meeting becomes easier and more relaxed for you, and you will start to recognise faces and build your confidence enough to contribute to the discussions.

One other thing to remember: you are a volunteer. The school and the rest of the governing body thank you for your time and your contribution.

## Mission Statement

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Acorns is a school for pupils with generic learning difficulties. We provide high quality special education for girls and boys aged 3 to 11 years of age, from Preston and the surrounding area.

Our Mission Statement is:

1. To provide a happy safe caring environment for pupils and staff
2. To encourage each child to fulfil their potential
3. To create an environment in which every child's efforts and achievements can be celebrated.
4. To develop an inclusive curriculum with enjoyment and excellence at its heart
5. To encourage all children to be independent learners

As a special school, we undertake admissions according to the local authority guide lines which can be found on the Lancashire County Council website – see “Useful Links” on our website

Details of the schools performance table is available on the Education website – see “Useful Links” on our website

## Our Aim – Every Child Matters

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This is our fundamental aim. As a school for pupils with generic learning difficulties, we are part of the education continuum and thus the purpose of education at Acorns will be the same as at any other school, namely for each child to achieve their full potential. However, we recognise that even though the goal remains the same, the help individual children need in progressing towards this will be very different.

Our pupils need educational opportunities which will equip them for life and enable them to operate successfully within their own environment and the wider community. In order to do this we will plan individual teaching programmes that take account of individual stated needs and the requirements of the National Curriculum.

Throughout all our work our aim will be:

- To fulfil the statutory obligations in relation to each pupil's Statement of Special Educational Needs or Educational Healthcare Plan.
- To provide a broad and balanced curriculum that acknowledges the age, maturity and different capabilities of the pupils, promotes personal fulfilment and encourages them to achieve the highest possible standards of performance in a wide range of educational and social activities.
- To prepare pupils to cope as independently as possible in the home, school and community by developing and encouraging initiative, the ability to make choices and promote the principle of self-advocacy.
- To promote the involvement of parents and carers in all aspects of school life.
- To promote the inclusive learning opportunities for pupils both within and outside school and to recognise inclusion is a two-way process.
- To provide learning opportunities that will equip pupils, where appropriate, for the demands of the world of work in a rapidly changing society.
- To be part of a multi-disciplinary team that identifies, provides and maintains the necessary standards for health care, safety, protection and wellbeing of all pupils, staff and visitors, complying with LEA regulations and procedures.
- To provide an environment that is safe and secure and enjoys the confidence of parents.

## Our website

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This is a valuable source of information for all; parents, staff and governors. It should be noted that the contents will be amended as required, so it is important to keep checking the website for new information.

This is also the place to read our regular Newsletter, which has only recently become online only.

Our School Prospectus is also located on our website, along with photographs of our children enjoying class and school trips.

## Staff members

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The full list of staff members can be found on our website

## Holidays and closures

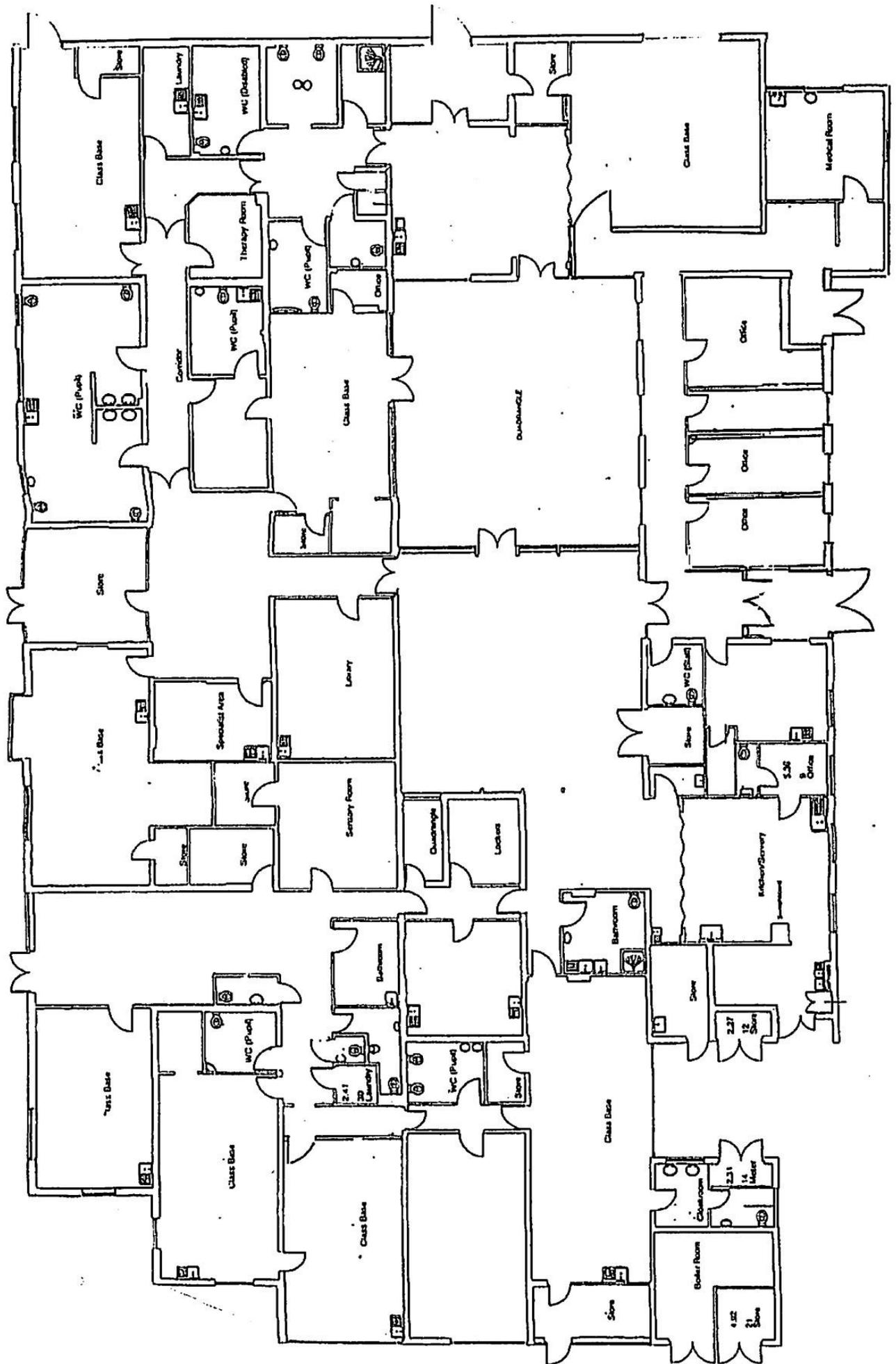
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The full list can be found on our website

## Map of School

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A map of the school can be found on the next page



## Governing body

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The current Governing Body consists of:

- Amanda Howarth (Chair)
- Deborah Hall (Vice-chair)
- Rukhsana Ahmed
- Sean Carlisle
- Liz Dewhurst
- Shaun Jukes
- Emma Lowe
- Jessica Miller
- Joan Parkin
- Barry Probin
- Christian Worsley

## Committees

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There are two Committees which hold regular meetings and report back to the full Governing Body at the next meeting. These Committees are:

Resources (Staffing/Finance, Buildings/Health and Safety)

Curriculum

## The Role of a Governor

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Governors and Governing Bodies are increasingly under the spotlight to ensure they exercise their leadership role effectively as part of leadership and management of the school.

Governors' roles are mainly strategic. Operational issues and the day-to-day running of the school are the responsibility of the head teacher and other staff.

Key functions are to:

- Ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Hold the head teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance of staff, and
- Oversee the financial performance of the school and make sure its money is well spent.

To focus on these functions governance involves a number of key activities:

## Key Activities

## Typical inputs



Each of these key activities can be broken down further into a range of actions. For example to help governors understand the school and monitor and evaluate the school's performance, actions might include:

- Looking at information about achievement – Raise online, performance dashboards, pupil progress tracking, results of national tests and assessments, data from baseline assessments etc.
- Receiving reports – HT's report to governors, reports from subject leaders, progress reports against priorities in the improvement plan and self-evaluation reports, reports from the local authority adviser, reports from senior staff about lesson observations and reviews of pupils' work
- Meeting with lead members of staff to explore particular priorities in the improvement plan
- Learning walks – with a member of staff looking at classrooms, playtimes, displays etc.
- Attending lessons to get a first-hand view of the school at work and how children learn – governor open days, pairs of governors visiting lessons and talking with pupils etc.
- Looking at children's books with subject leaders to focus on specific aspects e.g. marking and assessment
- Meeting with groups of pupils, for example the school council, to talk about what children like about the school and what could be better
- Attending senior leadership team meetings as an observer
- Attending parents' evenings to provide an opportunity for parents to meet governors
- Attending school events – assemblies, awards assemblies etc.
- Contributing to questionnaires and surveys for parents and reviewing the outcomes of them
- Linking governors with priorities in the improvement plan.

### **So, how effective are we?**

How well do we focus on our key functions and undertake our key activities. In other words, how do we check that we are 'fit for purpose'? There are several tools to help:

- Ofsted criteria (see Annex 1: Extract from Ofsted School Inspection Handbook – September 2014)
- 20 key questions for governing bodies (See Annex 2: National Governors' Association)
- Self-evaluation tool and action planning (Lancashire CC) – this links closely with the 20 NGA questions.
- 'Home-made' tools based on key actions.

The Ofsted criteria broadly encompass the areas covered by the NGA and LCC focus questions, but also include specific questions which are 'flavour of the month' e.g. evaluation of the impact of pupil premium.

### **References:**

A useful reference for Governors is:

Governors' Handbook (DfE, May 2014). This is downloadable from the DfE website

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

This replaces 'Guide to the Law'.

**Extract from Ofsted School Inspection Handbook (September 2014)**

**Inspectors should consider whether governors:**

- carry out their statutory duties, such as safeguarding, and understand the boundaries of their role as governors
- ensure that they and the school promote tolerance of and respect for people of all faiths (or those of no faith), cultures and lifestyles; and support and help, through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community, to prepare children and young people positively for life in modern Britain
- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction, including long-term planning (for example, succession)
- contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses, including the quality of teaching, and reviewing the impact of their own work
- understand and take sufficient account of pupil data, particularly their understanding and use of the school data dashboard
- assure themselves of the rigour of the assessment process
- are aware of the impact of teaching on learning and progress in different subjects and year groups
- provide challenge and hold the headteacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety, including by using the data dashboard, other progress data, examination outcomes and test results; or whether they hinder school improvement by failing to tackle key concerns or developing their own skills
- use the pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics
- ensure solvency and probity and that the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively
- are providing support for an effective headteacher
- monitor performance management systems and understand how the school makes decisions about teachers' salary progression, including the performance management of the headteacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management
- engage with key stakeholders
- are transparent and accountable, including in terms of recruitment of staff, governance structures, attendance at meetings, and contact with parents and carers.

## NGA Questions

### Twenty key questions for a school governing body to ask itself

**Right skills: Do we have the right skills on the governing body?**

1. Have we completed a skills audit of our governing body?
2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?

**Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?**

3. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?
4. Do we have a professional clerk and run meetings efficiently?
5. What is our training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?
6. Do we know about good practice from across the country?
7. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our governing body conducive to effective working?
8. Does every member of the governing body make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the governing body's performance?

**Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision?**

9. Have we developed long-term aims for the school with clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly monitored and reviewed?
10. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the governing body's activities and agenda setting?

**Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?**

11. Do we understand the school's performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?
12. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?
13. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?

**Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?**

14. How do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff?
15. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?
16. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

**Role of chair: Does our chair show strong and effective leadership?**

17. Do we carry out a regular 360 review of the chair's performance?
18. Do we engage in good succession planning?
19. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?

**Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?**

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the governing body's contribution been to this?

## Self Evaluation – an example provided by Alan Sykes, Governor at Manor Beach School

We should all evaluate our efficiency on a regular basis. We could use this tool to reflect honestly and critically on our strengths (s), aspects that are okay (o) and areas of weakness (w), with key evidence that supports your view. Where we have weaknesses, what do we need to do to improve?

Aspect of governance	Example performance questions (linked to the 20 NGA questions)	Evaluation s/o/w	Key evidence	What could we improve?
Do we have the right skills on the GB?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have we completed a skills audit of our GB?</li> <li>2. Do we appoint governors on the basis of their skills, and do we know how to find people with the necessary skills?</li> </ol>			
Are we as effective as we could be?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do we understand our roles and responsibilities?</li> <li>2. Do we run our meetings efficiently and are they clerked effectively?</li> <li>3. Do we have a training and development budget and does every governor receive the support they need to carry out their role effectively?</li> <li>4. Do we know about good practice?</li> <li>5. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our GB conducive to effective working?</li> <li>6. Does every member of the GB make a regular contribution and do we carry out an annual review of the GB performance?</li> </ol>			
Do we ensure a clear vision for the school?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have we developed long-term aims for the school and clear priorities in an ambitious school development plan which is regularly reviewed monitored and reviewed?</li> <li>2. Does our strategic planning cycle drive the GB activities and agenda setting?</li> </ol>			
Do we hold the school leaders to account?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do we ask for and understand the school's performance data well enough to properly hold school leaders to account?</li> <li>2. How effective is our performance management of the headteacher?</li> <li>3. Are our financial management systems robust and do we ensure best value for money?</li> </ol>			

<p>Do we engage well with our school community?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How well do we listen to and understand our pupils, parents and staff, and know the school?</li> <li>2. How do we report to our parents and local community regularly?</li> <li>3. What benefit do we draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?</li> </ol>			
<p>Do we have effective leadership of our GB?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do we carry out a regular review of the chair's performance?</li> <li>2. Do we engage in good succession planning?</li> <li>3. Are the chair and committee chairs re-elected each year?</li> </ol>			
<p>Are we having an impact on the outcomes for pupils?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How much has the school improved over the past three years, and what has been the GB's contribution to this?</li> </ol>			

## Governors' Handbook

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The Department for Education produce a Governors' Handbook which is available to all Governors.

Please take the time to read this and this should help with any questions. The Handbook can be found at: [http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Guidance/Legislation,policies-and-procedures/Government-advice-and-guidance/Governors-Guide-to-the-Law/Governors\\_Handbook\\_Sept2014.pdf.aspx](http://www.nga.org.uk/getattachment/Guidance/Legislation,policies-and-procedures/Government-advice-and-guidance/Governors-Guide-to-the-Law/Governors_Handbook_Sept2014.pdf.aspx)

## Schools Portal

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When you are elected as a Governor you will have access to the Schools Portal. This is where messages are placed, documentation is available (from and before meetings) and all information you might need as a Governor. This is a valuable source of information and you should ensure you do have access. If you do not, please ask for help.

## Training

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Training courses are available every year and a full list of these can be found in the Training and Development Programme booklet which you should receive from Lancashire Governor Services. The first course which would be beneficial is the New Governors course. Others relevant to your skills and to any committee to which you belong should also be considered. It is very useful to attend those course which you feel might be beneficial to you in expanding your skills and giving more to the school.

Training is also available online with GEL at [www.elc-gel.org](http://www.elc-gel.org). You will need to register with this site and follow instructions.

## Code of Conduct

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Every Governing Body should have a Code of Conduct. A Model of such a Code is set out below. As a Governing Body at Acorns we have not yet discussed this content, so any Code of Conduct has not officially been accepted. All Governors are expected to act within the Model set out below until a new, formal Acorns Code of Conduct is agreed.

## **A Model Code of Conduct for Governing Bodies**

The following code is suggested as a model. It provides a statement of the broad principles by which the governors of the school could operate. It may be adopted as it stands or adapted to reflect different governing bodies' ways of working. In either case it should be thoroughly discussed and supported by every governor before being formally agreed.

### **General**

The head teacher is responsible for the day to day management of the school, the implementation of policy and the operation of the curriculum. Governors have a responsibility for determining, monitoring and keeping under review, the policies, plans and procedures within which the school operates.

- The main aim of the school is to raise the educational achievement of all its pupils.
- The governing body will contribute most effectively to this aim by focusing on its three roles:
  - To provide a strategic view of where the school is heading.
  - To act as a critical friend by providing support and advice to the school.
  - To hold the school to account for the educational standards it achieves and the quality of the education it provides.
- All governors have equal status. Although governors are appointed and elected by different groups, their central concern is the welfare of the school as a whole.
- Governors have a general duty to act fairly and without prejudice at all times.
- In so far as they have, or share responsibility for the employment of staff, governors should fulfil all reasonable expectations of a good employer.
- Governors should consider carefully how their own decision might affect other schools.
- Governors should encourage open government and should be seen to do so.
- Governors do not act alone but as members of a corporate team. Individual governors have power only when it is delegated specifically to them by the whole governing body.

### **Commitment**

- Being a governor involves significant amounts of time and energy. Careful regard should be paid to this when agreeing to serve or to continue to serve on the governing body of a school.
- All governors should involve themselves actively in the work of the governing body and accept a fair share of the responsibilities, including service on committees.
- Regular attendance at meetings of both the full governing body and committees is essential.
- Governors should know the school well and take opportunities to visit it and become involved in school activities.

### **Relationships**

- Governors should strive to operate as a team in which constructive working relationships are actively promoted.
- Governors should develop effective working relationships with the head teacher, staff, parents, the Local Authority, the Diocese, other relevant agencies and the local community.

## **Confidentiality**

- Governors must observe complete confidentiality when asked to do so by the governing body, especially in relation to matters concerning individual staff, pupils or parents.
- Although decisions reached at governors' meetings are normally made public through the minutes, the discussions on which decisions are based should be regarded as confidential.
- Governors should exercise the highest degree of prudence when discussion of potentially contentious issues arises outside the governing body.

## **Conduct**

- Governors should express their views openly within meetings but accept collective responsibility for all decisions.
- Governors should only speak or act on behalf of the governing body when they have been specifically asked to do so.
- All visits to school should be undertaken within a framework which has been established by the governing body and agreed with the head teacher.
- In responding to criticism or complaints relating to the school, governors should refer to the school's 'Complaints Procedure' for the correct procedure to be followed and advise the complainant accordingly.
- Governors have a responsibility to maintain and develop the ethos and reputation of the school. Their actions within the school community should reflect this.
- Any pecuniary interest that a governor may have in connection with the governing body's business must be recorded in the register of pecuniary interests.
- Where an interest is declared, the governor must leave the meeting while the item is under discussion.

## **Training and Development**

Governor training and development is important. It benefits the school and individual governors, and can help to develop effective teamwork. Governors are encouraged to undertake training to further their individual interests within the governing body and the work of the governing body as a whole.

## **Mentoring**

An experienced governor who acts as a mentor to new governors can provide support and a listening ear for all aspects of the work of the governing body. Governors should be prepared to act as mentors, as required.

## **Meetings**

Individual governors do not have any authority in school. It is the collective decisions of all the governors together that carry authority. The activities that governors undertake outside meetings can be seen as preparation for the times when the governing body 'goes live' - in a meeting.

It follows that if a governing body is to carry out its functions well, its meetings are crucial. Below is a suggested 'Meetings Charter'. If the Chair, the Head, the Clerk and all the governors subscribe to, and implement, a charter such as this, the governing body will be giving itself the best chance of coming to informed, collective decisions.

## **Meetings Charter**

### **As a governor I expect:**

- people to attend regularly and be punctual;
- an agenda and relevant documents to reach me at least seven days before the meeting;
- an agenda that makes clear the purpose of each item;
- a Chair who keeps to the agenda, paces the meeting so that time is given to each matter in proportion to its importance, draws on all members for contributions and keeps discussions to the point;
- my contributions to be heard and others to contribute to the discussion;
- the decision making process to be quite clear;
- governors to work together and not to be stubbornly partisan;
- governors to take collective responsibility for decisions;
- minutes that summarise views succinctly, record decisions accurately and are made available, in draft form, soon after each meeting.

### **Others can expect me to:**

- attend regularly and be punctual;
- read the agenda, minutes and other papers before the meeting and note items I want to say something about;
- bring my papers to the meeting;
- make relevant and positive contributions;
- listen to and consider what other people want to say;
- accept my share of collective responsibility, even for those decisions that I do not personally agree with.

## **Visiting the School**

- Governors do not have an automatic right to enter the school. However, they do need to have the opportunity to arrange visits to the school in order to see governors' policies in action and to understand how the school works.
- In order to avoid misunderstandings arising, it is advisable for every governing body to draw up its own policy on governor visits. The details of such policies will vary from school to school, but common principles worth observing are:
  - All governors should visit the school.
  - The total number of visits per term should be agreed in advance with the head teacher. Too many visits can be disruptive to pupils' learning.
  - The date and timing of a visit should be arranged in advance with the head teacher and other staff involved.
  - Visits should have a clear focus, linked to a school policy, a curriculum area or an aspect of the school development plan.
  - If a governor is going to spend time in a classroom, this should be discussed with the class teacher so that both are clear how long the governor is coming for, what they are going to look at and what they are going to do.
  - Governors should understand that their visits do not replace professional inspections or the monitoring role of the head teacher. Governors should not make judgements about the effectiveness of the teaching that they see.
  - If governors are concerned about any aspects of what they have seen this should be discussed with the head teacher.
  - After the visit, the governor should report back, in writing to the governing body. How this is to be done should be made clear in the policy. A written report should be discussed with the head teacher before publication.

## Useful phone numbers

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Mandy Howarth	01257 273254
Deborah Hall	07966416161
Gail Beaton	01772 792681
Sue Shepherd	01772 792681
Lancashire Governor Services	01257 516150