



# Parent Academy Councillors Roles and Responsibilities



## Academy Council Roles and Responsibilities

### Parent Academy Councillors

#### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The role of an Academy Councillor within our Trust is an important one. In our governance arrangements, the Trust Board has sought to ensure that the responsibility to govern is vested in those closest to the impact of decision developing -making and that such responsibility matches the capacity of those assuming responsibility.
- 1.2 A Parent Academy Councillor is a representative of the parent body at the school and is not a representative for the parents. This is an important distinction and this briefing note offers some guidelines. We will keep the role descriptor under review and welcome your comments on how this important role works in practice.
- 1.3 Effective governance relies on active participation and curiosity and the role of the Parent Academy Councillor brings an important voice to the board.
- 1.4 The role of Parent Academy Councillor is not – and should not – be any different to that of any other Academy Councillor and the parents can play a key part in helping the Local Advisory Board fulfil its various responsibilities.
- 1.5 Parents are not elected to lobby the Academy Council (AC) or to argue the case for their own child(ren) but to bring a parent perspective to the discussions and activities undertaken by the AC. This is sometimes not easy which is why the Parent Academy Councillors need to be fully cognisant of the Trust's Code of Conduct, confidentiality, have undertaken governance and other governance training and commit to attending meetings which are mostly after school hours. The role is unpaid. The role can also be very rewarding in terms of increasing and widening your knowledge of the school and the role the Academy Councillors should play in school improvement.
- 1.6 ACs must all uphold the values of the Shaw Education Trust. For ease of reference these values are;
  - To be pupil and people centred
  - To act with integrity
  - To be innovative
  - To be best in class
  - To be accountable
- 1.7 Parent Academy Councillors bring wider knowledge to the AC eg of the local community, the parent body; they have knowledge of the school from the perspective of a parent and they can sometimes advise other Academy Councillors on how policies are being applied in the school.

- 1.8 You cannot be a Parent Academy Councillor if you work at the school for more than 500 hours in a school year – this is the same as in the maintained sector and is good practice. The reason being that the AC needs to demonstrate it has a board and balanced skill set.

### 2.0 What is a Parent Academy Councillor?

- 2.1 The election must be open to all eligible members of the parent body and should be held by secret ballot. Please refer to our processes for elections. Interested parties are encouraged to complete the required nomination forms and provide a short personal description as why they wish to be elected and what they can bring to the board.

### 3.0 The Do's and Don'ts

- 3.1 Parent Academy Councillors should not be seen or act as a 'go-between' or act as a parent delegate and should not either put themselves in, or find themselves put in by others, this position. If they find themselves for any reason in such a position then they should seek the advice, and support of, the Headteacher/Principal, Chair or the CEO.
- 3.2 All Academy Councillors must act according to their own conscience and this is the same for the Parent AC. They need to fully understand the school's Complaints Policy and when and how to escalate any issues. It is not their role to resolve issues, to promise to resolve issues or to make comment about how the school has discharged its functions. The role of Parent AC is one of a 'signpost' not a 'conduit'.
- 3.3 You will be expected to sign a Code of Conduct (based on the Seven Principles of Public Life<sup>1</sup>) and should follow the appropriate rules of protocol and confidentiality as set out by the AC, the school and the Trust.
- 3.4 Some practical ways to achieve this balance include:
- Always be clear about what information can be reported back to parents,
  - Never promise to 'solve a problem' on your own – always seek the advice of the Headteacher/Principal and/or chair if you are unsure.
  - Never press your own personal agenda at the expense of others and be very clear if you are expressing a personal opinion – this applies to all Academy Councillors.
  - You should not participate in discussions where you have a personal interest (eg if a business run by a family member is being considered); when in doubt take guidance from the chair, Headteacher/Principal or trust central team. You may be asked to leave the room. This is not personal.
  - You can hold the office of chair or vice-chair.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-7-principles-of-public-life/the-7-principles-of-public-life--2>

- You should not be asked to take minutes unless it is an emergency – if you are taking minutes you cannot fully participate in discussions.
- You can take part in the Headteacher/Principal's appraisal as a member of the panel approved by the AC if asked to do so.
- Being a Parent Academy Councillor does not give you an automatic right of access to the Headteacher/Principal, senior leaders or any staff members. You are encouraged to follow the Trust's Academy Councillor Visits Protocol.
- You must respect confidentiality at all times.
- You will be asked to sign the Trust's Social Media Policy and whilst being active on social media is not a restricting factor in being a member of the AC you must be careful what you write or 'like'. Being active on social media for governance and education can in fact be excellent CPD.
- You should try to keep as up to date as you can with training.

### 4.0 All Parent Academy Councillors:

- Have equal rights with all other Academy Councillors – your vote has equal weight and value.
- Should follow the agreed procedure for putting items on the agenda,
- Should feel free to express their own personal views, it being recognised that this is not necessarily the view of the majority of the parent body.
- Do not have a mandate to express any views other than their own. However, they should report in good faith any widely held Parent views, even if in a vote they decide to vote differently – it is acknowledged that this is not always easy and the AC must respect this.
- Try to attend governance and AC training sessions both in school and outside,
- Should be aware of the sensitivity of meeting discussions and clarify before leaving any meeting which items can be reported to parents and which items the AC wish to remain unreported until the minutes of the meeting have been confirmed; when in doubt seek the advice of the Headteacher/Principal/AC Chair whichever is most appropriate in the circumstances.
- Should play an active part in meetings, and always try to submit your apologies in advance if you cannot attend. The AC comprises 9 people and it is important that we are quorate.

### 5.0 Managing Conflict

- All Academy Councillors are required to declare any business and pecuniary interests and interests in items on the agenda at every meeting and this applies to Parent Academy Councillors as well. If for example a family member working in school it is appropriate to bring this to the attention of the AC as appropriate and you will need to complete the annual Declarations of Business Interests and keep this up to date at all times. This is to ensure transparency.

- The Chair of the AC should create a climate where the Parent Academy Councillor can speak freely.
- You must never discuss your child(ren) or their friends at the AC meetings.

### 6.0 Other opportunities

- As a member of parent body you may be eligible to become a Co-opted Academy Councillor. Due to the differing settings, phases and skills gaps on our AC across the Trust if you are interested please contact the COO/Head of Governance.
- If you are keen to becoming an Academy Councillor and you are not elected to be a Parent AC at the school where your child(ren) attend there may be opportunities for a role in other schools in the Trust; again please contact the COO/Head of Governance in the first instance.

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