

# A guide for prospective school governors or academy trustees

---

What governance boards do and what being a governor or trustee involves



<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
<b>Contents</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why do Schools have Governance Boards?</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Role of the Governor/Trustee</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Expectation and Time Commitment</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Support for those in Governance</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>What to do next</b>	<b>8</b>



## Introduction

If you are reading this guidance then it is possible that you are thinking about becoming a governor in a maintained school, a trustee in an academy or a governor on a Local Governance Committee in a Multi-Academy Trust.

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 education.

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

The role of a governor or trustee is subject to 'qualification and disqualification regulations' (see appendix 1), please review this before proceeding. If you are able to volunteer as a governor or trustee this guidance document is intended to give you an understanding of the role and the time commitment involved to help inform your decision.



## Why do schools have a governance board?

Boards of governors (also known as governing bodies) or boards of trustees are responsible for the conduct of the school or academy and they are accountable for ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in their educational setting. In Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) a Local Governance Committee also have some delegated accountability on behalf of the Trust board for an academy within the MAT.

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 those in governance and that as an individual who is part of the corporate body for a maintained school, a stand-alone academy trust or a multi-academy trust you will have a strong focus on three central strategic functions:

### 1. **Strategic Leadership and Vision:**

- The board sets the school's or academy's vision, ethos, and strategic direction. This involves defining the long-term goals and aspirations for educational excellence.

### 2. **Accountability and Assurance:**

- The board holds the Headteacher or Principal accountable for the educational performance of the school and its pupils and be assured that statutory requirements are met.

### 3. **Financial Oversight and Compliance:**

- The board ensures effective financial management by overseeing the financial performance of the school or academy. It ensures that funds are well spent and complies with regulatory, contractual, and statutory requirements.

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

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

It is the Headteacher's or Principal's responsibility to manage and control the school or academy, underpinned and supported by the strategic framework established by the board.

For Local Governance Committees in a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) the focus will depend on their delegated authority.

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

## Role of the Governor or Trustee

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

As a governor or trustee you are part of the team that has a strategic role and with the expectation of:-

1. Contributing to the strategic discussions at board meetings which determine:
  - The vision and ethos of the school or academy;
  - Clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school or academy;
  - That all pupils/students, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
  - The school's or academy's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation;
  - The school's or academy's staffing structure and key staffing policies;
  - The principles to be used by school or academy leaders to set other school or academy policies.
  
2. Holding the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's or academy's performance, including:
  - Agreeing the outcomes from the school's or academy's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school/academy development plan;
  - Considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by leaders and external sources on all aspects of school/academy performance;
  - Asking challenging questions of school/academy leaders.
  
3. Ensuring all 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 to:
  - Appoint the Headteacher and other senior leaders;
  - Appraise the Headteacher and the performance management of staff;
  - Consider pupil exclusions;
  - Sit on a final stage complaints hearing.

## Expectation and Time Commitment

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

- Have the well-being and success of the school or academy as their central concern;
- Act fairly and without prejudice at all times;
- Understand that all governors or trustees have equal status;
- Appreciate that in general no governor/trustee has individual power (there are certain exceptions);
- Be actively involved in the work of the board and accept a fair share of responsibility;
- Make every effort to attend and participate in the meetings and prepare for them by reading papers and thinking about agenda items. They must accept decisions made by the majority;
- Work in partnership with the Headteacher/Principal and all the staff;
- Understand and balance their own strategic role with the Headteacher's or Principal's responsibility for the implementation of policy and the day-to-day management of the school or academy;
- Make the effort to get to know the school/academy (or academies in a multi-academy trust) and its staff, pupils and parents. This involves supporting the school's or academy's activities. It also involves first-hand experience of pupils' learning, through a 'Governors/Trustees in School Policy' agreed by staff and the board;
- 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 for dealing with criticisms and complaints.

Being an effective governor or trustee does mean promising to commit 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/academy; this will mean visiting to get to know it, preferably during the working day, or attending training.

There will be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting and appointing a Headteacher/Principal or serving on a panel of the board such as pupil exclusion, complaints or staff discipline/grievance and your time commitment is likely to increase if you become the chair of the board or chair of a committee.



## Support for Governors or Trustees

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

- Information, advice and guidance on governance roles and procedures by telephone and email.
- A comprehensive training and development programme, including induction.
- A half termly bulletin distributed electronically.
- Access to our service website [www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/sgs](http://www.supportservicesforeducation.co.uk/sgs)

### Support from your school/academy

Every school or academy should have an induction programme for its new governors or trustees 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 or academy.

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

### 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 with holiday or time off in lieu.

Most board 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 the school or academy during the day in regard to:

- Meet a member of staff or to visit a classroom;
- Attend a school/academy 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 and knowledge and more importantly feel that you are able to commit the time required there are two ways to find out about vacancies in your area:

- Contact schools or academies 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 or academy you will be informed, along with other parents, of any vacancies for parent governors or trustees.
- Contact Education Governance – if you don't have a specific school or academy in mind or have further questions then contact the governance team who will be happy to help 0300 790 6855 or [sgs@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:sgs@somerset.gov.uk)



## Appendix 1

### Qualification and Disqualification Disclaimer

**Please read all of the points on the form to ensure that you are not disqualified from serving as a school governor**

- I am** not a registered pupil at the school.
- I am** aged 18 or over at the time of my election or appointment.
- I do not** hold another governor post at the same school at the same time. (unless renewing a current position)
- I have not** been removed as an elected governor in the previous 5 years.
- I am not** the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order, debt relief restrictions order, an interim debt relief restrictions order or their estate has been sequestrated and the sequestration has not been discharged, annulled or reduced is subject to a disqualification order or disqualification undertaking under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, a disqualification order under Part 2 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, a disqualification undertaking accepted under the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, or an order made under section 429(2)(b) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (failure to pay under county court administration order)
- I have not** been removed from the office of charity trustee or trustee for a charity by the Charity Commission or Commissioners or High Court on grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement, or under section 34 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 from being concerned in the management or control of any body
- I am not** included in the list of teachers or workers considered by the Secretary of State as unsuitable to work with children or young people
- I am not** barred from any regulated activity relating to children
- I am not** subject to a direction of the Secretary of State under section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- I am not** disqualified from working with children or from registering for child-minding or providing day care
- I am not** disqualified from being an independent school proprietor, teacher or employee by the Secretary of State
- I have not** been sentenced to three months or more in prison (without the option of a fine) in the five years before becoming a governor or since becoming a governor
- I have not** received a prison sentence of two years or more in the 20 years before becoming a governor
- I have not** at any time received a prison sentence of five years or more
- I have not** been fined for causing a nuisance or disturbance on school premises during the five years prior to or since appointment or election as a governor
- I will not** refuse a request by the clerk to apply to the Disclosure and Barring Service for a criminal records check.