



Conflict of Interest Policy

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1. Introduction and Aims

At Willow Bank School we want to ensure that the decisions taken by members of staff and by the Board of Governors are free from personal bias and don't unfairly benefit any individual or company connected to the school.

This policy aims to ensure that everyone to whom the policy applies (see section 3):

- Understands what a conflict of interest is
- Understands their responsibility to identify and declare any conflicts of interest
- Understands what actions will be taken if a conflict of interest is identified

At Willow Bank School we will ensure that:

- Every potential conflict of interest, or perceived conflict of interest, is identified, recorded and prevented
- Decision-making isn't affected by conflicts of interest
- There are clear procedures for managing conflicts of interest where they arise

This policy does not form part of any employees' contract of employment. It may be amended at any time.

2. Legislation and Guidance

This policy is based on:

- Statutory guidance from the Department for Education (DfE) on the [constitution of governing bodies of maintained schools](#)
- [The School Governance \(Roles, Procedures and Allowances\) \(England\) Regulations 2013 \(as amended\)](#)
- The [maintained schools governance guide](#)
- Statutory guidance from the DfE and Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) on [schemes for financing local authority maintained schools](#)

3. Scope

This policy applies to:

- All members of the school staff
- Volunteers working in the school
- All members of the governing board
- Associate members of the governing board

For the purposes of this policy, we refer to all of the above as "staff", except where we refer to some specific roles.

4. Definition – Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest is any situation in which a member of staff has a business or personal interest or loyalty that could or could be perceived to, prevent them from making a decision only in the best interests of the school. Conflicts of interest can be actual, potential and perceived. They may be financial, professional, personal or indirect.

It's not possible to provide an exhaustive list of what constitutes a conflict of interest, but some examples include where:

- A member of staff is related to a child within the school
- A member of staff has a connection or friendship with families within the school
- A member of staff currently has or has had a sexual or intimate personal relationship with another member of staff

- A member of staff undertakes paid or voluntary work outside of their position at the school/trust that involves pupils from the school.
- A member of staff is involved in invigilating examinations or assessing//submitting coursework for a pupil who is known to them outside of school
- A governor works for a company that provides or has the potential to provide, services to the school
- A governor owns their own business and sometimes does work for the school
- A governor is in a relationship with a member of staff
- A governor also sits on the governing board of another school or trust
- The class teacher of a parent governor's child is subject to a disciplinary hearing

Employees are expected to conduct themselves in a professional, sensitive and confidential manner.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Chair of Governors

The Chair of Governors will:

- Ensure that the register of interests is completed each year
- Make sure declarations of interest are made before each governor/trustee meeting
- Arbitrate decisions about how to deal with conflicts of interest, where appropriate
- Monitor this policy and seek advice on any necessary changes

5.2 Clerk to Governors

The clerk will:

- Maintain the register of interests, and update it when governors and members of staff inform them of changes to their circumstances
- Advise the board on how to deal with conflicts of interest

5.3 Governors

All Governors will:

- Declare their conflicts of interest before or during meetings, and complete the register of interests faithfully
- Make sure they inform the chair and clerk immediately of any changes to their circumstances
- Take appropriate action to remove any conflict of interest, or seek advice on how to do so if necessary

5.4 Senior Leaders

Senior Leaders will:

- Communicate the conflict of interest policy to all relevant individuals within their areas of responsibility
- Review procedures annually to ensure that they anticipate and manage potential and actual conflicts of interest
- Ensure that all new staff receive conflict of interest information at induction

5.5 Members of Staff

All Staff members will:

- Ensure they are familiar with the conflict of interest policy
- Read and understand the conflict of interest policy annually
- Disclose any activity or relationship that may give rise to a potential conflict of interest

6. What must be Declared

6.1 What Governors must Declare

Governors must declare:

- Any current business interest in a company that could stand to gain from their position on the governing board
- Any relevant pecuniary interest in any contract the school holds or proposes to enter into
- Governance roles in other educational institutions
- Material interests arising from relationships with other governors (including spouses, partners and close relatives)
- Material interests arising from relationships with members of the school staff (including spouses, partners and close relatives)
- Business interests of their spouses, partners and close relatives, where there's a possibility that the school will have dealings with that person

If a governor isn't sure whether something constitutes a conflict of interest, or whether it needs to be declared, they should err on the side of caution and declare it.

The headteacher and any governors who are staff members must declare an interest in relation to matters of their own pay and appraisal and must not participate in discussions or decisions about these.

Apart from the headteacher, any governors who are staff members must also declare an interest in relation to matters of the pay and appraisal of any other staff member and must not participate in discussions or decisions about these.

6.2 What School Staff Should Declare

School staff should Declare:

- Any friendship or family relationship where there is a potential conflict of interest, for example a relationship between staff members, involvement in recruitment involving friends or family members etc.
- Any current business interest in a company that could stand to gain from their position as a member of the school staff
- Any relevant pecuniary interest in any contract the school holds or proposes to enter into
- Business interests of their spouses, partners and close relatives, where there is a possibility that the school will have dealings with that person
- Governance roles in other educational institutions
- Any friendship or family relationship where there is potential for a conflict of interest. Staff must be aware of potential conflicts of interest when recruiting

6.3 Conflicts of Interest relating to Examinations

Willow Bank School will manage any conflicts of interest related to examinations by informing the relevant awarding bodies about any members of staff who are teaching and preparing members of their family (which includes stepfamily, foster family and similar close relationships) or close friends and their immediate family (e.g. son/daughter) for qualifications that include internally assessed elements.

The school will maintain clear records of all instances where staff have members of their family (which includes stepfamily, foster family and similar close relationships) or close friends and their immediate family (e.g. son/daughter) entered for examinations and assessments at the school.

Staff members who will need to declare potential conflicts of interest include:

- Teachers involved in the preparation of exam papers – i.e. teachers who see question papers before an exam is taken
- Teachers who mark public exams
- Staff involved in checking examination material prior to the exam (e.g. exams officers, lab technicians for practical's, etc.)
- Teachers involved in the marking and moderation of internally assessed coursework

The school will:

- Contact all members of staff to ascertain any conflict of interest
- Record any confirmed or suspected conflicts and any steps taken to mitigate will also be recorded
- Share with the relevant staff member any steps taken to mitigate conflicts of interest, so they are aware of actions in place and any additional requirements they need to adhere to
- Inform any awarding bodies of any relevant conflicts of interest
- Any member of staff who needs to declare a conflict of interest relating to exams should do so in writing.

Whistle-blowing

Anyone concerned about the integrity of any aspect of the public exams process should raise their concerns with the relevant exam board.

Concerns about the conduct of exams at the school should be raised with the headteacher.

7. Procedures

7.1 Register of Interests

Willow Bank School requires each member of staff and each governor to complete a Declaration of Interests for at the beginning of each academic year.

New members of staff and governors will also be asked to complete a declaration of interest form if they join after the start of the academic year.

Every member of staff, including the headteacher and members of the governing board must identify and declare potential conflicts of interest.

Declarations should be made as soon as possible once they are identified.

The school will explore potential conflicts of interest when:

- Reviewing applications for any position in the school/trust, including staff member, trustee and governor appointments
- Reviewing the register of interests for governors/trustees. This will take place on an annual basis. Everyone who is required to complete an annual declaration must do so each year, even if there are no conflicts of interest to register
- Reviewing the agenda of governing board / board of trustees / local governing board meetings. Governors/trustees will be asked to declare any interest they have in any agenda item before it is discussed at the meeting
- Establishing relationships with external contractors. All relationships of a business or private nature with external contractors, or potential contractors, should be made known to the headteacher. In the case of the headteacher, any financial interests or relationships of a business or private nature must be declared to the governing board
- A member of staff changes role or responsibility

The school will publish governors' interests on its website.

The headteacher and any governors who are staff members aren't required to record their employment with the school on the register of interests.

If an individual's circumstances change after the register of interest is completed, they must immediately alert their line manager or the chair and clerk of the governing board that they need to make amendments or further declarations.

7.2 Declaring Conflicts of Interest and taking Action (Governors)

Agendas of meetings will be circulated in advance. Governors must review any agenda sent to them and alert the chair and the clerk as soon as possible if they have a conflict of interest related to any item on the agenda.

Each meeting will also include a standing agenda item to allow declarations to be made. If a conflict becomes apparent during a meeting, and governors don't declare these prior to or at the beginning of the meeting, they must declare these immediately.

Depending on the nature of the meeting or discussion, and the interest in question, the board will decide whether the individual needs to:

- Withdraw from the meeting
- Refrain from contributing to the discussion
- Refrain from voting on a decision

The board may also decide that having declared the interest, the governor is free to participate in the discussion or decision as normal.

When deciding which course of action to take, the board must:

- Always make their decision in the best interests of the school, and be able to demonstrate this
- Act to protect the school's reputation
- Consider the impression that their actions and decisions may have on those outside of the school
- Consider the level of risk related to the decision in question, and the risk that the conflict will affect the individual's ability to be impartial, or to act only in the best interests of the school
- Be aware that the presence of a conflicted governor (even if they cannot participate in the decision or discussion) may inhibit free and open dialogue, and may affect the decision in some way

In cases of **serious conflict of interest**, the board may also choose to avoid the conflict by:

- Not pursuing a particular course of action
- Proceeding with the issue in a different way
- Not appointing a particular governor or employee
- Securing a resignation from a conflicted governor

A serious conflict of interest includes situations where the conflict:

- Is so acute or extensive that the individual isn't able to make their decisions in the best interests of the school or could be seen to be unable to do so
- Is present in significant or high-risk decisions
- Means that effective decision-making is regularly undermined or cannot be managed in accordance with the required or best practice approach

Details of any conflicts declared, and relevant actions taken, will be recorded in the minutes.

7.3 Declaring Conflicts of Interest and taking Action (Staff Members)

Recruitment of family and friends:

- Staff will not be involved in recruitment and safer recruitment processes involving family and friends
- If a family member or friend is appointed to a role, it may be appropriate to put in place alternative line management structures to eliminate a conflict of interest

Confidential information obtained during work:

- Staff should not disclose confidential information to anyone, including family and friends
- If an employee is in doubt about what information can or can't be disclosed, they should speak with their line manager

Staff whose children attend the school:

- Whilst at school, the staff member's relationship with their child should follow the normal expectations that would apply with any other pupil. This may need to be explained to their child to ensure appropriate boundaries are maintained
- The staff member will not be involved in any behaviour management matters relating to their child. If the staff member becomes aware of an issue, this should be discussed with their line manager
- Communication regarding a staff member's child should be carried out in the usual way. A staff member should not make use of the school's internal systems to gain additional information about their child

Undertaking paid or voluntary work with pupils outside school hours:

- Where paid work is undertaken, it should be disclosed to the school
- Staff should ensure that confidentiality and appropriate demarcation are established

Contractors and suppliers:

- Staff should declare a relationship to any existing or potential contractor or supplier

Misuse of position:

- Staff should not use their position to gain an advantage or disadvantage with any person or organisation
- Staff must declare any personal interest that may affect their impartiality

8. Failure to Declare a Conflict of Interest

Governors:

Failure to declare a conflict of interest is a breach of the board's code of conduct.

If the board becomes aware that a governor hasn't declared a relevant conflict of interest, it will immediately update the register of interest to ensure the record is complete and accurate.

Depending on the nature of the omission, the board may also:

- Vote to suspend the governor/trustee
- Vote to remove the governor/trustee from office
- Follow any relevant disciplinary procedures

If a governor is aware of another governor's undeclared interest, they should alert the chair and the clerk immediately. The procurement process should then be started again.

Members of staff:

Failure to declare a conflict of interest will be dealt with in line with the staff code of conduct.

9. Compliance and Review

Compliance with this policy is mandatory. The policy be reviewed annually, any information declared will only be used for the purposes intended within this policy.