



Children's Services

The Role of a Parent

Governor (under The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012)

2017

Introduction

This booklet is part of a series explaining the roles of the different types of governors in Central Bedfordshire Schools.

Central Bedfordshire Council values the contribution made by you and all governors to the success of its schools and recognises the time, energy and commitment that all governors give to their schools.

Governing bodies are an integral part of school leadership, setting the ethos of the school, driving continuous improvement, supporting, challenging and holding to account the head teacher and other members of the school leadership team by negotiating stretching targets for improvements in standards and monitoring progress towards them and overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

Your role as a governor is strategic and will continue to evolve to meet the needs of children in the 21st Century. Increasingly, schools will need to work in partnership and collaborate and the focus of our governing bodies will be in delivering outcomes for children in the wider community.

In March 2012, Central Bedfordshire Council formally adopted a renewed Education Vision for Central Bedfordshire. The renewed vision takes account of the new educational policy context created by the coalition government but retains the spirit and ambition of the Council's original vision.

This clears the way to develop approaches to raising attainment and improving learning, teaching and leadership which are based on shared high expectations, working through strong, accountable partnerships and commissions creating school-led improvement and the systematic capture and transfer of successful practice.

We support all governors by offering advice and resources on various aspects of governance and a subscription to a high quality training programme which includes face to face training and a suite of on-line training modules. See our website: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/school/governors/being.aspx>.

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Categories of school governors

The current model of governance in schools is a stakeholder model; people who are representative of all those groups which have a vested interest, or a stake, in the effective delivery of education and care in a school have a voice in how their schools operate. The primary consideration in the appointment and election of new governors should be the skills and experience the governing body needs to be effective.

Governing bodies are made up of (under The School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012):

Parent governors	Local Authority governor
Staff governor	Partnership governors
Co-Opted governors	Associate members
Foundation governors	Headteacher

Within certain limits, governing bodies are free to determine their own size and membership. The constitution of the governing body is set out in its Instrument of Government. Regulations specify that a school must have at least 7 governors and must include the following:

- At least 2 parents governors
- The headteacher unless he/she resigns the office of governor, in which case it remains vacant
- 1 staff governor
- 1 local authority governor

In addition, the governing body may appoint as many co-opted governors as it considers necessary (providing that the requirements are met in relation to governing bodies of foundation and voluntary schools). Those eligible to be elected as the staff governor may also be appointed as co-opted governors so long as their number, when counted with the headteacher and the staff governor, does not exceed one third of the total membership of the governing body.

Additional requirements for foundation and voluntary schools:

Foundation school or a foundation special school which does not have a foundation

The governing body must also include at least two (but no more than one quarter of the total) partnership governors.

Foundation school or a foundation special school which has a foundation but which is not a qualifying foundation school

The governing body must also include at least two (but no more than 45 per cent of the total) foundation governors.

Qualifying foundation school

The governing body must also include such number of foundation governors as to outnumber all the other governors by up to two.

Voluntary aided school

The governing body must also include such number of foundation governors as to outnumber all the other governors by two.

Voluntary controlled school

The governing body must also include at least two (but no more than one quarter of the total) foundation governors.

In calculating the number of governors required in order to comply with this regulation, the number is to be rounded up or down to the nearest whole number.

All members of the governing body have equal status in the responsibilities they share (although there are some exceptions for staff governors and associate members). It is helpful to share the workload and to work to the strengths and interests of all individual governors.

Role of the governing body

The governing body is the strategic leader of the school and has a vital role to play in making sure every child receives the best possible education. This is reflected in the law, which states that the purpose of maintained school governing bodies is to 'conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school'. In all types of schools, governing bodies should have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- b. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and
- c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

These functions are reflected in regulations that came into force in September 2013 and in the criteria Ofsted inspectors use to judge the effectiveness of governance in schools.

Key activities of the governing body:

- Understand the school – pupil attainment and progress; pupil behaviour, attendance and safety and teaching quality and staff development
- Set the school's strategic direction – the vision, ethos and values; set priorities for school improvement and consider governance structure

- Commission action – agree improvement targets and strategies; agree allocation of resources and agree how to monitor and review progress
- Performance manage school leaders – appoint headteacher and support their leadership; hold school leaders to account for progress and ensure financial probity and efficiency
- Ensure governing body is fit for purpose – clarify role and purpose; review constitution and ways of working and ensure members have the necessary skills

The governing body of a community, a community special and a maintained nursery school is a corporate body. A corporate body has a separate legal identity from that of its members.

An effective governing body will use the skills of all its members.

Parent Governors

Parent governors are elected by other parents at the school. Any parent, or carer, of a registered pupil at the school at the time of election is eligible to stand for election as a parent governor. Parent governors may continue to hold office until the end of their term of office even if their child leaves the school.

Schools must make every reasonable effort to fill parent governor vacancies through elections. The Regulations, however, make provision for the governing body to appoint parent governors where:

- not enough parents stand for election,
- at least 50% of the registered pupils at the school are boarders and it is not reasonably practicable to elect, or
- in the case of community special or foundation schools established in a hospital, the governing body judges that an election is impractical.

The method of appointment is set out in paragraphs 10 and 11 of Schedule 1 to the Regulations.

Governing bodies may only appoint as a parent governor a parent who has, in their opinion, the skills to contribute to effective governance and the success of the school.

Every effort should be made upfront to avoid potential difficulties later by informing prospective candidates of the nature of the role and securing their agreement to a clear set of expectations for behaviour and conduct – as set out in a code of conduct. The 2012 Roles, Procedures and Allowances regulations set out the basis on which governing bodies may suspend governors, including parent governors.

A parent governor believes that parents should have a say in matters affecting their children's education.

You should meet the relevant statutory eligibility criteria for school governors as set out in the Regulations and you will have:

- an interest in all the children's futures
- a desire to make a difference
- a willingness to accept responsibility
- an ability to work in a team, ask questions, listen and learn

As a parent governor you hold the unique position of having a parental viewpoint. Through the children you will have first hand experience of the curriculum and how the school is perceived from the consumers' point of view. You will be able to bring this perspective to the strategic management of the school.

As a parent governor you do not have to vote in a particular way because you have been pressed to do so by parents. Objectivity, however, is essential. You are not there to promote the interests of your own children but all children. Parent governors are elected by other parents and it is important to establish a rapport with the parental body that elected you, whilst continuing to maintain a strategic approach to school governance.

You are disqualified from being elected or appointed as a parent governor if you are an elected member of the local authority or are paid to work at the school for more than 500 hours in any twelve consecutive months.

As an effective parent governor you:

- help to decide the priorities for improving the school
- make yourself available to parents and listen to other parents' opinions and take account of them as you contribute to governors' decisions
- work in partnership with the headteacher, senior leadership team and cooperatively with other governors to raise standards and improve outcomes for all children
- prepare for meetings by reading papers beforehand
- take responsibility for your own learning and development as a governor including attending training
- attend full governing body and relevant committee meetings promptly, regularly, and for the full time
- read briefings and newsletters for governors; present a balanced view of issues representing different sections of the community
- promote the interests of the school in the wider community
- be loyal to the decisions made by the governing body
- respect the confidentiality of governing body affairs
- never promise to 'solve a problem' on your own
- never press your own child's case at the expense of others
- declare an interest and withdraw from any meeting where you, a partner or close relative or associate stands to gain, or where you are so close to a matter discussed it is difficult to be impartial

- have regard to the broader responsibilities as a governor of a public institution in regard to promoting accountability for the actions and performance of the governing body

Support you can expect from the Local Authority

The LA provides support through training and other resources for members of governing bodies. Access to the following is available:

- induction training – all governors are expected to undertake induction training within the first 6 months of their appointment, as a minimum requirement
- a comprehensive, high quality training and development programme aimed at supporting improvements in leadership, management and governance; all training is free of charge to the individual governor or associate (schools may be charged separately for training for associate members)
- courses designed to develop and update knowledge around finance matters and governors and associate members with responsibilities for safeguarding, special educational needs, Health and Safety and succession planning will find courses that will support them in their work.
- an extensive collection of e-learning for governors and associate members in schools that subscribe to the LA training programme
- a newsletter, Governors' Essentials, which is provided monthly via email; an archive of back copies is available on the governors' section of the Central Bedfordshire Council website
- the governors' website with a range of resources
- telephone support from governor services: contact: 0300 300 8105

Your Training Link governor can provide more information about governor training and induction.

Time commitment

Governors are expected to attend all full governing body meetings and committee meetings as appropriate.

Each governing body must meet at least three times per year (once per term) but some meet twice per term.

Each school is different in respect of their schedule of meetings and you should clarify with your governing body the time commitment required. In addition to meetings you will also be expected to visit the school in action.

Although you will have a good knowledge of the school through your child's experience, formal visits as a governor are an essential part of your role, particularly in relation to monitoring and evaluating.

Note: a governor is disqualified from holding office if they fail to attend governing body meetings without the consent of the governing body – for a continuous period of six months, beginning with the date of the first meeting missed. In addition to meetings, you will also be expected to visit the school in action.

This is an essential part of your role, particularly in relation to monitoring and evaluating. Often governors are invited to attend school events such as assemblies and sports days.

Time off from work

Under employment law, employers must give employees who are school governors reasonable time off to carry out their duties. The employee and employer have to agree on what is reasonable. Employers may give time off with pay but do not have to do so.

Communication and confidentiality

You have a significant part to play in raising the awareness of the role of governors amongst parents and in enhancing home-school communication in general. There are several ways you could do this which might include, for example:

- contributing to a governors' column in the parents newsletter or a governors' page on the school website
- playing a part in drafting surveys to seek parents' views and analysing the feedback

You can also help to ensure that the governing body keeps a clear focus on ensuring that the school provides an effective, safe and stimulating environment for all children. If, however, an issue comes to a vote, you should vote on the basis of what you consider to be in the best interests of the school.

The work of the governing body is recorded in the minutes which should be made available to all parents apart from confidential items.

As a parent governor you are free to report any decision in advance of publication of the minutes if you are sure that you are not breaching a confidence of the governing body and that the information you are presenting is accurate and that it is appropriate for you to report the decision.

Note - you would be breaching the confidence of the governing body if you reported how individuals voted, comments made by individuals or individual discussions. When reporting on decisions taken by the governing body you should use 'we' and not 'they' as you are part of the decision making group. Even if you personally voted against the final decision you must support the corporate decision making process and take ownership of the outcome.

Complaints

Parent governors are not there to provide an alternative route to addressing individual parental concerns, although if you do become aware of more widespread disquiet about the school's policy and practice then you should alert the headteacher and chair. Sometimes a parent governor may be approached with a complaint.

If a parent has a concern or complaint which is very specific to their child, you should, if approached, advise them to follow the school procedure; do not get involved. It is not your role to hear the complaint details. They should try to resolve their concerns by speaking to the appropriate teacher. If the parent remains dissatisfied with the outcome, suggest that they make an appointment to speak to the headteacher or head of year. You should guide parents regarding appropriate lines of action, making them aware of the school's complaints policy and procedures. If a parent raises issues of general concern with you, you should suggest that they make these known to the headteacher.

Being a parent governor does not disqualify you from your usual rights as a parent, including making a complaint.

Allowances for expenses

School governors provide a voluntary service, and cannot be paid for their role as a governor. But they can receive out of pocket expenses. This may include reasonable expenses to cover travel costs or child care costs incurred as a result of fulfilling their role as governor - this does not include payments to cover loss of earnings for attending meetings. Where the board has a delegated budget, whether to pay allowances and what allowances might reasonably be paid are matters for the board to decide.

Travel expenses must be at a rate not exceeding the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) approved mileage rates which are changed annually and are on HMRC website. Other expenses should be paid on provision of a receipt and be limited to the amount shown on the receipt.

Term of office

You are appointed as a parent governor for a term of four years unless the school's Instrument of Government has specified a lesser period. A shorter term of office can be helpful in nursery schools where children may just be present for one or two years. Whatever the term of office, you do not have to stop when your child leaves the school but when your agreed term has expired. You may resign at any time by giving written notice to your Clerk of governors.

Nolan principles of public life

1. **Integrity:** do not allow the influence of bodies outside the school to affect your duties
2. **Accountability:** make choices on merit
3. **Objectivity:** submit to appropriate scrutiny
4. **Openness:** only restrict information when the public interest clearly demands this/ data protection
5. **Honesty:** declare any private interest
6. **Leadership:** promote and support these principles by leadership and example
7. **Selflessness:** act always in the public interest, not for personal gain

Contact us:

If you have a question about governance, need support with a problem, or want to share good practice, please contact us:

By telephone: 0300 300 8105: Email: joanna.brown@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Information and resources for Central Bedfordshire governors can be found at: <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/school/governors/being.aspx>.



A great place to live and work

Contact us...

by telephone: 0300 300 8304

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