

Governors and Governing Bodies - Frequently Asked Questions

- **What is a Governing Body?**

Every school has a governing body made up of various members of the community. There can be between 9 and 22 members. The governing body works closely with the Headteacher, who is responsible for the day to day management of the school. The governing body is part of the school leadership team, responsible for strategic planning and policy development. They work as a team to make sure the school provides a good quality education for all its pupils.

Joan Sallis, a governor from Richmond and author of a regular column in the Times Educational Supplement, gives this description of the role of the governing body in her book *School Governors: Your Questions answered*

“to

- * support the school, but not uncritically
- * explain its policies to parents and the community, but not blindly
- * help to settle its disputes, fairly and conscientiously
- * oversee its policies and its use of resources, but not in tiresome detail

- **How are Governing Bodies made up/Who are the members?**

*Parents -Every governing body will include parent governors, in community schools all of these will be elected by parents in the school (unless there are fewer interested parents than there are places), In Voluntary Aided schools a proportion of these parents will be appointed by other governors from amongst parents in the school.

*School Staff - These will be elected by the staff at the school. All Governing Bodies have positions for teachers and most have a position for support staff.

Headteachers are automatically entitled to be a member of the governing body but can choose if they wish to be a voting member or not.

*Local Education Authority Governors – These governors are appointed by the Local Education Authority, here the London Borough of Hounslow. The authority advertises for LEA governors and seeks to appoint members of the community who are interested in education and committed to being fully participating school governors. *The application form for an LEA Governor is available at the end of this item)*

* Co-opted/Community Governors – All Community School Governing Bodies have Co-opted Governors (soon to be renamed Community Governors). These are appointed by

the other members of the governing body from members of the Community. Some governing bodies ask for our help in finding people interested in filling these positions but it is entirely up to the governing body who they appoint. The application form for an LEA governor can be used to express an interest in Co-opted Governor vacancies but the criteria may differ from school to school according to their needs.

*Foundation Governors – Voluntary Aided or Controlled Schools have Foundation Governors from the Foundation that originally established the school. They are usually (but not always) connected with the Church organisations. Some governors are appointed by the Diocesan Boards and some by various parish/parochial councils for the churches associated with the school.

*Sponsor Governors – A few schools have a firm or organisations which gives substantial help to the school, whether financial or in kind. These schools can choose to have one or two sponsor governors in addition to the other categories.

- **Are Governors paid?**

No, all governors are volunteers and there is no payment for carrying out the role. Some governing bodies operate schemes to reimburse governors for necessary expenses such as care for children or dependent relatives.

- **So how might I benefit from becoming a Governor?**

Individual governors have a real opportunity to contribute and make a difference at the school where they serve and this can be extremely rewarding on a personal level. However becoming a governor can also bring opportunities to attend courses and develop transferable and marketable skills, for example in chairing meetings, budget monitoring or staff recruitment, which they might have no opportunity to develop in their normal workplace or home life.

- **I don't know anything about education so what could I offer?**

It is important that governors come from a wide range of backgrounds. The school staff and many of the parents will have a knowledge of education. Governors from other areas of work or experience bring a vital outside view and can make suggestions and ask questions which might not be thought of by people closely involved with the school. Although schools may occasionally be looking for a governor with specific outside experience, finance or personnel for example, personal qualities, such as enthusiasm, tact and the willingness to listen and to ask questions are far more important than specific knowledge or experience. Individual governors will have different beliefs, values, views and experience to contribute to the work of the whole governing body.

- **What do Governors need to do to carry out their role?**

Governors attend meetings of the full governing body once or twice a term. Most governing bodies have a number of committees or working groups and all governors are expected to join one of these. Again these usually meet once or twice a term. Governors need to be able to read the reports and papers circulated for these meetings and be prepared to ask questions about them. All governors are strongly encouraged to attend the introductory course for new governors - a four session course offered termly. Governors need to spend some time in school while the school is open at a convenient time for them. Many governing bodies have arrangements where a governor takes a particular interest in a class of children or a subject area, which gives a focus to visits to

the school. Once a year the governing body prepares a report for parents to explain how they have carried out their role during the past year.

Governors need to get to know their schools well and to be aware of their strengths and their areas for development and work with the school staff to plan the action required to achieve these developments. They also need to be involved in monitoring and evaluating their implementation.

- **Are there any reasons why someone can't become a Governor?**

Almost anybody over 18 can serve as a governor but there are some understandable restrictions. No one can serve if they are barred from working with children or vulnerable adults, if they have severe mental illness such that they are detained under the mental health act or if they are an un-discharged bankrupt. People with certain criminal convictions are ineligible depending on the nature of the offence and sentence and how long ago the offence took place. Although full criminal records checks are not routinely required, any governor who refused to apply for one when asked to do so would be disqualified. A full list of reasons for disqualification are included in the application form to become a governor and applicants should sign this to confirm that none of these apply to them.

There are a few other restrictions which help protect the balance of interests on governing bodies. For example Local Councillors are eligible to be appointed as LEA governors but not as Co-opted/Community governors. There is a new requirement gradually being phased in that people who are paid to work in the school for more than 500 hours in a year will not be able to be appointed to any category other than staff governor. Existing governors in this situation are able to serve to the end of their term of office.

- **Why do schools have Governors**

There have been school governors for at least 600 years although more recently they have been given more responsibilities and a higher public profile. They are part of a long tradition of involving lay people in policy making, as for example in local councils, or boards of health authorities and charities and they play an important part in local democracy and public accountability.

In most local Councils, education accounts for approximately half of Council expenditure and the majority of this is delegated to individual schools and their governing bodies. The governing body is responsible for setting the school budget and ensuring the money is being spent appropriately to obtain the best value possible.

However accountability is wider than finances. What happens in schools affects not only children and their parents but also the whole community. It is important that schools' ethos, aims, values, priorities and practices have the support of that wider community.