

Being a Parent Governor / Co-opted Governor

Guidance for parents

Fundamentally, your role as a parent and governor is no different to that of the other governors. You have equal rights and status with all other governors and you are not restricted in your role to matters of parental interest. Being a parent governor involves achieving a delicate balance of roles. Parents can now join governing bodies by two routes; they can be elected by fellow parents or be appointed as co-opted governors based on their skills. Whether individuals are elected or appointed to either category they do not carry an obligation to express any views apart from their own and do not represent the parent body. However they hold the unique position of having a parental viewpoint. Through your children you will have first hand experience of the curriculum and how the school is perceived from their point of view.

The term “parent governor” is used throughout to refer to both elected parent governors and co-opted governors who are parents.

Parent governors are:

- ◆ well placed to understand parents’ views and to remind the governing body how matters being discussed affect parents;
- ◆ individuals who act according to their own conscience. How they vote on any decision is up to them;
- ◆ in a good position to help the governing body to communicate effectively with parents;
- ◆ equal in status to all other governors.

Parent governors are not:

- ◆ expected to gather the views of other parents and take them to the governing body;
- ◆ simply expected to represent the interests of parents;
- ◆ a link between parents and the governing body;
- ◆ expected to vote as instructed by other parents.

How to fulfil your role

- ◆ Attend governing body meetings regularly and play an active role in committees and decision-making.
- ◆ Learn all you can about the school.
- ◆ Consider how the school communicates with parents?
- ◆ Consider how easy is it for parents to go into school to discuss things with the headteacher or teachers.
- ◆ Consider how accessible the governors are – do parents ever get the opportunity to meet with governors; do they know how to get in touch with the chair of governors if they need to.
- ◆ Learn how the school handles complaints and read the complaints policy.
- ◆ Be approachable to other parents, but make sure you are clear about your role.
- ◆ If another parent approaches you with a complaint, advise them to speak to follow the complaints process.
- ◆ Always represent the school positively.
- ◆ As a governor you are one of a group and must never act alone.
- ◆ Always support the decisions of the full governing body. Have your say on decisions in meetings and vote in the way you wish; but then support the outcomes of votes – even if you disagree with them.
- ◆ Always observe confidentiality. You will get to know a lot of highly sensitive and confidential information – don’t discuss it with anyone who is not a governor. Remember, a governor can be suspended for serious breaches of confidentiality.

How you can help individual parents

From time to time you may be approached by other parents asking for help, or wanting to make a complaint about something the school is, or isn't doing.

- ◆ Make it clear you can't act for the governing body.
- ◆ Don't raise expectations that the school will "put it right" – there may be underlying issues or background that you don't know about.
- ◆ Keep an open mind – there are at least two sides to every story!

What to do if you experience a conflict between being a parent and being a governor

- ◆ This can happen – especially if you think the governing body is making decisions which you feel will adversely affect your child(ren).
- ◆ If a difficulty arises, take a step back and think things through as objectively as you can.
- ◆ If you are concerned, talk to the headteacher or to the chair of governors.
- ◆ Make sure you don't break confidentiality when discussing your concerns outside governing body meetings.