

Categories and roles of school governors

Background

School governors are the country's largest voluntary group with around 300,000 contributing to strategic development and raising standards of achievement at more than 30,000 schools.

School governors are members of their school's governing body, which is known as a 'corporate body'. A corporate body has a legal identity that is separate from its members and as a result, individual governors are generally protected from personal liability as a result of the governing body's decisions and actions provided they act honestly, reasonably and in good faith.

Individual governors have no power or right to act on behalf of the governing body except where the whole governing body has delegated a specific function to that individual or where regulations specify a function is to be exercised in a particular way.

School governors are drawn from different parts of the community and can be parents and staff or from the LA, the community and other groups. This helps ensure the governing body has sufficient diversity of views and experience but does not mean governors of a particular category represent that group on the governing body. For example, parent governors do not represent the parents at the school and do not report back to them.

Responsibilities

The governing body has a range of duties and powers and a general responsibility for the conduct of the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement. Its responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- setting targets for pupil achievement
- managing the school's finances
- making sure the curriculum is balanced and broadly based
- appointing staff
- reviewing staff performance and pay.

The governing body has considerable discretion as to how to discharge its responsibilities but is required to constitute itself in line with the regulations and to appoint a chair and vice chair. The governing body may delegate certain of its responsibilities to certain governors or committees of governors, although in general, it is not compelled to do so.

Roles and actions

There are a range of roles and actions the governing body or individual governors need to consider:

- Constitution of the governing body – the governing body must be constituted in line with the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003. These regulations cover the number and type (category) of governors that make up the governing body.

- Terms of reference of the governing body – more information can be found on the Department for Education website or on www.Governor.net.co.uk about the different categories, roles and committees that can be involved with being a governor. In brief, the different categories are:
 1. parent governors: selected by election (or appointment if insufficient people stand for election) and drawn from parents and carers of children at the school
 2. staff governors: selected by election from teaching and support staff paid to work at the school
 3. community governors: appointed by the governing body to represent community interests
 4. associate members (not governors): appointed by the governing body to attend committee meetings and/or full governing body meetings due to their particular skills or experience.

- Roles of governor – the governing body must appoint a chair and vice-chair and may wish to make a number of other specific appointments to lead on certain aspects of the school.
- Committees of the governing body – the governing body can delegate certain of its responsibilities to committees or individual governors. At BHGS we have two committees:
 1. Curriculum & Standards
 2. Finance & Resources

Further information and reading can be found on the National Governors' Association website.

Specific roles within the governing body

All of the below guidelines and information can be adapted for other specific roles e.g. curriculum area governor, health and safety governor, inclusion governor etc.

Example 1 - What is a training link governor?

Although not a statutory requirement, most governing bodies have a link governor to act as a link between the school and LA to advise their governing body of training opportunities available and on topical developments within governance. LAs such as Barnet, Gloucestershire, Thurrock, Birmingham and Buckinghamshire provide advice on link governors on their websites. Most LAs will provide you with their own local guidance.

Generally, you may be responsible for

- helping the governing body identify its training needs
- encouraging individual governors to attend training courses and report back to the governing body
- providing relevant information to the governing body about training matters
- becoming a link for training and development between the governing body and the LA
- helping new governors settle in and make them aware of training opportunities provided by the LA and others
- encouraging all governors to become involved in the work of the governing body and the school
- attending termly meetings organised by (some) LAs for link governors, at which will be given information about the training which is available, and an opportunity to share ideas and experiences with other link governors.

Example 2 - What is a curriculum area link governor?

The term "link governor" is also used for specific subjects e.g. English, Maths, RE, SEND, etc. Again, these are not statutory requirements, but are good practice.

It is of course, a matter for each governing body and headteacher to plan its own guidelines on the role that it expects the "specific subject" link governor to undertake. A good working relationship between the subject specialist within the school and the subject link governor will enhance the success of this initiative.

As a model, the subject link governor, in support of the subject co-ordinator or head of subject, could undertake some or all of the following:

- Become informed about relevant documents and legislation; OfSTED criteria for evaluating the subject provision; local and national issues impacting upon the subject.
- Liaise with the subject coordinator or head of subject to become informed about staffing arrangements and training; the condition and availability of resources; curriculum and

timetable arrangements; special needs provision; reference to the school development plan; assessment and recording procedures for the subject; which visits and visitors are planned.

- Establish and maintain effective lines of communication between the subject co-ordinator and the governing body; report back to governing body meetings.
- Help to keep parents informed via the school prospectus, newsletter and meetings.

Example 3 - What could the role of an SEND governor entail?

Being a special educational needs and disabilities governor is about doing your best to make sure pupils with SEND get the help they need to access the curriculum and to participate fully in the life of the school. As an SEND governor, you are the link between the governing body and the school in relation to pupils with SEND. It's your role to help raise awareness of SEND issues at governing body meetings and give up-to-date information on SEND provision within the school. You also help review the school's policy on provision for pupils with SEND and ensure that parents have confidence in this provision.

There's certain basic information that every SEND governor should know:

- how the school identifies children with SEND - make sure you understand how the school identifies a pupil with SEND and what happens once a pupil has been identified;
- how SEND money from LAs is allocated and spent - different LAs organise SEND funding in different ways. You should understand how your LA provides SEND resources and how your headteacher and governing body decide how these resources are spent for all pupils with SEND in your school;
- the school's SEND policy - you should know your school's policy on SEND and make sure it's reviewed regularly. Regular reviews are vital to ensure that the SEND provision reflects the changing needs of the school, its circumstances, and the law; and
- develop good relationships in the school - developing good relationships with the key people involved in the school is essential. It's particularly important to get to know the head and the SEND coordinator (SENDCO).

Good practice checklist

Arrange class visits with the head/SENDCO to gain an understanding of how your school delivers SEND provision.

Set up regular meetings with the SENDCO.

Attend governing body meetings and take a central role in discussions about SEND.

Visit the school as often as you need to, staying informed and attending LA training for SEND governors.

Find out what links your school has with other local schools, SEND support services and parents.

Many LAs also have information available on SEND.