



WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A GOVERNOR IN OUR SCHOOL?

Foundation Governors

The Role of the Foundation Governor in a Catholic School

These are very challenging times for schools, with greater expectations of teachers and pupils, comparisons made with education systems across the world, information technology changing incredibly fast, jobs being created that were never dreamt of when we were at school, youth unemployment rising and very tight Government funding. We certainly cannot spend ourselves out of these corners and neither can we return to curriculums of old which catered for a very different world than our young people will find themselves in.

To ensure our children are equipped to succeed, the day-to-day offer by schools to this generation has to be different from the ones we experienced, yet at the same time ensuring our eternal Catholic values remain at its core.

Are you interested in helping us continue to rise to these exciting challenges? There is an important role that as a member of the parish you can volunteer to do – that of school governor.

School governors are often described as ‘unsung heroes’ including by Government ministers. Their work is largely hidden from view.

In Catholic schools, foundation governors – practising Catholics appointed by the Diocese – make up the majority of governors. A foundation governor has a responsibility to preserve and develop the Catholic character of the school, but like all governors, also has to ensure high standards of educational achievement by the children.

It is the role of the school governing body to both support and challenge the school, in particular to ensure the headteacher is held accountable for the education provided. Long gone are the days when being a governor was little more than a cup of tea and a chat about how lovely the school is. Over the years as schools have gained greater independence from local authorities, more duties have been given to governors. Being on a governing body is now much more akin to being on the Trustee Board of a charity or on the Board of Directors of a limited company. The buck stops with the governing body, and while this is a great responsibility, it can also be incredibly rewarding.

Just under three-quarters of Catholic schools are rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding, as our School is. Even outstanding schools require good governance; schools can be quite fragile places, and an outstanding headteacher leaving a school can make it vulnerable, especially where recruiting

a Catholic head is difficult due to short supply of good candidates.

Governing bodies are a corporate body, made up usually of between 10 and 18 people, and amongst its members the team needs to have a range of skills and diverse from outside the education sector – such as experience of governance in other sectors, strategic planning, staff recruitment, data analysis, performance management, community relations, problem solving, financial management, premises management, procurement, legal expertise, and many others. Clearly, no one person will bring all of that to the table, but if you do feel you have something to offer and are able to make a commitment, please do consider putting yourself forward to be a Foundation governor at our School.

You can start the process three-ways – have a conversation with the Chair of Governors- Mr. Paul Hamilton (who you can get in touch with

through the School), contact your Parish priest, or contact the Archdiocese of Birmingham. If you are appointed, you should receive induction training, and the National Governor's Association publishes a 'Welcome to Governance' guide which should be of help in your early days (see www.nga.org.uk).

The Catholic ethos, rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ, permeates all aspects of the life of the school. And as part of those values, we want to ensure excellence and that all our young people meet their potential, achieving the most they possibly can and setting them up to take advantage of available opportunities and make a full contribution during the rest of their life.

Guidance on -: What it means to be a Governor from the National Governors' Association (NGA)

The National Governors' Association (NGA) is an independent charity that aims to improve the educational standards and well-being of children and young people through supporting and promoting outstanding governance in all state-funded schools, including academies and free schools.

WHAT DOES A GOVERNOR DO?

Role of a school governor: To contribute to the work of the governing body in ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in the school by:

- Setting the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction;

- Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

Activities: As part of the governing body team, a governor is expected to

1. Contribute to the strategic discussions at governing body meetings which determine:
 - the vision and ethos of the school;
 - clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school;
 - that all children, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
 - the school's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation;

- the school's staffing structure and key staffing policies;
- the principles to be used by school leaders to set other school policies.

2. Hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance; this includes:

- agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan;
- considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of school performance;
- asking challenging questions of school leaders;
- ensuring senior leaders have arranged for the required audits to be carried out and receiving the results of those audits;

- ensuring senior leaders have developed the required policies and procedures and the school is operating effectively according to those policies;
- acting as a link governor on a specific issue, making relevant enquiries of the relevant staff, and reporting to the governing body on the progress on the relevant school priority; and
- listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders : pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community, including local employers.

3. Ensure the school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including the necessary expertise

- on business management, external advice where necessary, effective appraisal and CPD (Continuing Professional Development), and suitable premises, and

that the way in which those resources are used has impact.

4. When required, serve on panels of governors to:

- appoint the headteacher and other senior leaders;
- appraise the headteacher;
- set the headteacher's pay and agree the pay recommendations for other staff;
- hear the second stage of staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
- hear appeals about pupil exclusions.

The role of governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role.

A governor does **NOT**:

- Write school policies;
- Undertake audits of any sort – whether financial or health & safety - even if the governor has the relevant professional experience;

- Spend much time with the pupils of the school – if you want to work directly with children, there are many other voluntary valuable roles within the school;
- Fundraise – this is the role of the PTA – the governing body should consider income streams and the potential for income generation, but not carry out fundraising tasks;
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – the governing body monitors the quality of teaching in the school by requiring data from the senior staff and from external sources;
- Do the job of the school staff – if there is not enough capacity within the paid staff team to carry out the necessary tasks, the governing body need to consider and rectify this.

As you become more experienced as a governor, there are other roles you could volunteer for

which would increase your degree of involvement and level of responsibility (e.g. as a chair of a committee). This document does not cover the additional roles taken on by the chair, vice-chair and chairs of committees.

In order to perform this role well, a governor is expected to:

- get to know the school, including by visiting the school occasionally during school hours, and gain a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses;
- attend induction training and regular relevant training and development events;
- attend meetings (full governing body meetings and committee meetings) and read all the papers before the meeting;
- act in the best interest of all the pupils of the school; and
- behave in a professional manner, as set down in the governing body's code of conduct, including acting in strict confidence.

Time commitment: Under usual circumstances, you should expect to spend between 10 and 20 days a year on your governing responsibilities; the top end of this commitment, which equates to about half a day per week in term time, is most relevant to the chair and others with key roles, such as chairs of committees. Initially, we would expect your commitment to be nearer 10 days a year. However, there may be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting a headteacher. Some longstanding governors may tell you that they spend far more time than this on school business; however, it is fairly common for governors to undertake additional volunteering roles over and above governance.

Under Section 50 of the *Employment Rights Act 1996*, if you are employed, then you are entitled to ‘reasonable time off’ to undertake public duties; this includes school governance. ‘Reasonable time off’ is not defined in law, and you will need to

negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed.

Expenses: Governors may receive out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of fulfilling their role as governor, and NGA recommends that a governing body should have such an expenses policy. Payments can cover incidental expenses, such as travel and childcare, but not loss of earnings.

