

How to become a school governor : opportunities, training , roles and responsibilities – briefing paper

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What governors do

I would like to signpost potential governors to the “Becoming a Governor” page on our website:

<http://www.schools.southwark.gov.uk/governance/welcome>

Here you will find a link to the NGA document “What does a governor do?”, which expands on the main aspects of the role of being a school governor, specifically 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.

Governors are expected to contribute to the strategic discussions at governing body meetings, and hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school’s performance. Governance is included within the leadership and management section of the OFSTED inspection framework, so it is important that the minutes of governing body and committee meetings reflect that governors are supporting and challenging the SLT.

What governors don’t do

The document also sets out what governors don’t do:

- Write school policies (these are usually written by the Headteacher and circulated to governors for comment, and then adopted by the governing body as a whole);
- Undertake audits of any sort (governors are required to sign a Register of Interests declaring any business interests);
- Spend much time with the pupils of the school;
- Fundraise (this is the role of the PTA);
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching (there is guidance on link governor visits);
- Do the job of the school staff (the governing body review staffing levels).

Expenses/Time off

It is statutory for governing bodies of maintained schools to have a Governor Allowances’ Policy. This means that you can recover incidental expenses as a result of being a governor – such as travel or childcare – although you can’t be reimbursed for loss of earnings. Page 43 of the Governors’ Handbook states that:

By law, employers must give employees who are school governors in maintained schools 'reasonable time off' to carry out their duties. The employee and employer must agree on what is 'reasonable time off'

So you can have time off work, for example if you need to leave an hour early to attend a governing body meeting – although your employer might disagree with you about what constitutes a 'reasonable amount of time'!

Time commitment

Typically, governing bodies meet once a term. They will usually have a Curriculum committee (to look at attainment and progress) and a Resources committee (to look at finance and the budget, premises, personnel and pay issues). Governors would usually be expected to join one committee, with would also meet once a term. All non-staff members join the First and Second committee, so that there is a pool of governors in the event that a panel of three governors needs to be called, for example if there needs to be a meeting to consider a Capability or Disciplinary issue, an exclusion, or a Complaint.

Schools usually have link governors – these may be based around year groups, subjects, or areas linked to their School Improvement Plan. If you have a specific interest in a certain area and you are the link governor for that area, you would be expected to visit the school at least once a year and write a brief report that would go to the Headteacher, before being circulated to the rest of the governing body.

Governors are also expected to attend training in order to be fully equipped to perform their role. Most schools buy into the Southwark training offer, so courses are paid for by the school. The Induction course for new governors is split into 6 modules and is very popular, and schools can have in-house training sessions where the trainer comes to the school and trains the whole governing body on a particular subject. There is also a wealth of information in the Model Policies, Procedures and Guidance section of our website to help governors do their job:

<http://www.schools.southwark.gov.uk/governance/model-policies-procedures-and-guidance>

Schools that buy into our SLA have a dedicated clerk that is available to give advice to school governors, and I am also available to any governor that requires further guidance.

How to become a governor

Out of 103 governing bodies in Southwark, there are currently 250 Parent governor posts, 201 of which are filled. Schools are required by law to publish on their school website the structure of the governing body and any governor who has been in post in the last twelve months, their category and term of office. If you are unsure if there are any Parent governor vacancies at your school, get in touch with them directly via the school office and they will let you know. If there are vacancies, and assuming there are no plans to reconstitute, the Headteacher will appoint a returning officer to run a Parent governor election. Governor Services have written Parent governor election procedures which are available for all schools to use/adapt if they wish, and these can also be found in the Model Policies, Procedures and Guidance section of our website:

<http://www.schools.southwark.gov.uk/governance/model-policies-procedures-and-guidance>

If your school is following the procedure, you will be asked to write a short statement outlining why you would like to be a governor and what skills you feel you can bring to the role. If the number of applicants matches the number of vacancies – so for example, if there

is one vacancy and you are the only applicant – then at the closing date of the election, you will be elected unopposed and you will be a governor with immediate effect. If there are more applicants than vacancies – say you are one of three parents going for two vacancies – then there needs to be a ballot, where parents have the opportunity to vote for who they want to elect. This is why it is important to have a strong statement, so parents have a reason to vote for you!

Once elected, the school will notify me and I will send you an induction pack including the NGA Welcome to Governance booklet, and copies of the latest Governor Services bulletin and training brochure. You will then be required to apply for a DBS through the school office within 21 days of your election.

If you are unsuccessful, or if there are no Parent governor vacancies at your school, then there are other avenues to become a school governor, either at your child's school or at another school. On our website you will find a link to the School Governor One Stop Shop (SGOSS), which is where we take our application forms from:

<http://www.schools.southwark.gov.uk/governance/welcome>

Once these forms are sent through to me, I then keep in contact with schools to fill their Authority and Co-opted governor vacancies, based on where the applicant lives in relation to the school, and on the skills that they have in relation to the skills that are required by the governing body following a skills audit. Authority and Co-opted governors are appointed by the governing body (with Authority governors having their nomination approved by the LA first), and as parents are also eligible to fill vacancies in these categories, you might find that there are other opportunities for you to become a school governor.

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