

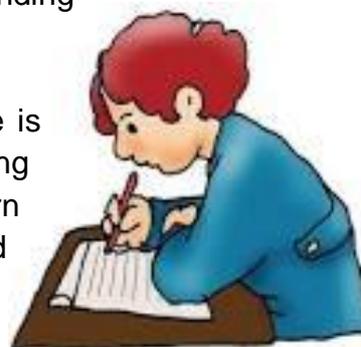
Being a Parent Governor



Many governors start by being parent governors. The desire to influence your own child's education for the better motivates many people to dip a toe into governance. This means that at times you will have to wear several different "hats". Being a parent governor should never compromise you being a parent. The aim of this article is to offer advice to new parent governors on their specific role.

Governors work as a team. No one is expected to know everything and your contribution helps the governing body to support school to be the best it can be. All governors are unpaid volunteers and the governing body should recognise you will give what time you can. This may vary year to year depending on what your circumstances are.

Developing your role as a governor will take time. There is new jargon to learn, courses to attend and understanding the way governance works. Many of the skills you will learn may be directly transferrable back to where you work and may enhance your promotion prospects. Some employers give paid time off for governors, it may be worth asking.



Parent governors are:

- well placed to understand parents' views
- to remind the governing body how matters being discussed affect parents;
- individuals! How you vote on any decision is up to you;
- in a good position to help the governing body to communicate effectively with parents;
- equal in status to all other governors.

Parent governors shouldn't be:

- 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.

Being a governor

Being a governor is a privilege. The only reason governors exist to ensure each and every child in their school receives the very best education possible. We are all there for the same reason.

A governor is a responsible role. You have the opportunity to make a difference, not only for your children, but for children in years to come and your community.

The role of governors is to provide strategic direction. Although that's a complicated concept it means we don't tell the head teacher and teachers what to do. They are responsible for what happens in school, called operational responsibility.

Governors are the point of accountability for the senior management of school and governors are school leaders. How well education is delivered, the results achieved and how well the school is financially managed are all part of what governors regularly discuss.



The important questions to governance are “why” and “what”. We look at impact and the standards achieved. A typical question may be “£15,000 was spent on new laptops. What was the impact of that?”

Understanding both why a decision was made and the impact it has had on learning affects the decision making process. A reasonable question should always get a reasonable answer and if you are unsure or there was too much jargon ask for an explanation. We all have been in the position where we are learning a new role.



Governors work as a team. Always be supportive of the collective decision. You must not express personal dissatisfaction at decisions to the wider school community. If you feel strongly say so at the point the decision is being made. Rumours will result in damage to your school which is the last thing you want.

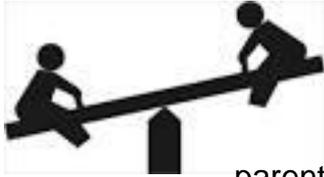
Always observe confidentiality. As a governor you will get to know a lot of highly sensitive and confidential information – don't discuss it with anyone outside meetings. Imagine how you would feel if someone did that to you? Your governing body will have a code of conduct. The simplest way to be removed as a governor is to reveal confidential information to someone else.

If you are approached by anyone with serious concerns, please refer them to the school complaints policy. You need to have a certain distance; later you may be part of a panel which has to decide the case.

Never raise expectations that things will be “put right”. Decisions like that are usually made by school staff. That is their job.

What happens if you have a dilemma between being a parent and being a governor?

Very occasionally the governing body could make a decision which you feel may affect your child in a way you would not have chosen. If a difficulty arises, take a



step back and think things through as objectively as you can. If you feel you can't be objective it's reasonable to leave the meeting while the discussion is held. If you still feel that it is unfair you must raise this in the same way as any other parent. Speak to the head teacher as your first port of call.

Make sure you don't break confidentiality when discussing your concerns outside governing body meetings.

Where to get help, advice and support

Everyone starts off as a new governor. There are many different places to learn about what being a governor means.

- From other governors.
- From the chair of governors.
- From the clerk to the governing body – they are the professional in how things work
- Ask for a governor mentor or “buddy” to help you through the first few months.
- Attend any new governor training offered.
- Your LA may have a governor support team you can email or call.
- There are several governor websites run by governors and a regular twitter meeting run by @UKgovchat – you don't have to contribute but you can read what's going on

If at first everything seems confusing and difficult to get to grips with don't worry. Most new governors feel this way. As you learn more about how things work and who is responsible for what you will gain confidence. Don't feel you have to know everything straight away.