

What is involved in being a governor?

The governing body has a general responsibility for seeing that the school is run effectively so that it provides the best possible education for its pupils. This has to be done within the framework set by legislation and the policies of the Local Authority.

Governors are NOT expected to take detailed decisions about the day-to-day management of the school. That is the job of the Headteacher. A good Headteacher will discuss all the main aspects of school life with the governing body and expect them to offer general guidance. The governing body are accountable to parents and the LA for the way the school is run.

When you become a governor you receive a "welcome pack" from the Local Authority.

The Department for Education (DfE) also produces a [Guide to the Law for School Governors](#) which is available free to all governors. It gives an outline of the powers and duties of the governing body which include:

- helping to establish (with the Headteacher) the aims and policies of the school, and how the standards of education can be improved
- deciding the conduct of the school; how, in general terms, it should be run
- helping to draw up the school improvement/development) plan with the Headteacher and staff.
- helping to decide how to spend the school's budget
- making sure that the National Curriculum and religious education are taught
- selecting the Headteacher and undertaking the Headteacher's performance management
- determining the staffing complement of the school
- acting as a link between the local community and the school
- drawing up an action plan after an inspection and monitoring how the plan is put into practice

You may look at this list and think that you do not have the skills or experience to be a governor but do not let this put you off.

Governors have a shared responsibility for the school and bring a variety of views and experience to the task. The responsibilities sound great but they are not carried by individuals. The Governing Body makes decisions collectively and a great deal of support and training is available. Governors can always get expert advice and training from the Local Authority and other sources.

How much time will it take up?

Meetings

The full governing body usually meets once per term but may meet more often . You will also be expected to join at least one committee. Working Groups will meet from time to time to complete particular tasks.

As well as agenda papers for meetings you will need to read other information to keep in touch with school issues and the wider education agenda.

You may be involved in staff appointments and Governing body committees have to also meet to deal with pupil discipline matters and complaints.

Visiting the School

Individual governors are often nominated to take a particular interest in an area of the school's work and will need to visit and meet with staff in school.

All governors are encouraged to get to know the school through visiting during the school day. Governors will also be asked to attend events to demonstrate support for the school.

Reading and Preparation

Agendas and papers for meetings will arrive about 10 days before governors meetings.

Sheffield City Council provides training and support for governors. Where possible governors are helped with childcare arrangements for attending Local Authority training

There is a wealth of information available from the Department for Education and other sources which governors may want to read. Most of this is now accessible via the Internet.

Time Off From Work

Employers should give employees who are school governors "reasonable time off" to carry out their duties. What is "reasonable time off" should be agreed with your line manager.

Expenses

It is possible for governors to be paid out of pocket expenses and each school must have a clear policy on this.

Getting to Know Your School

When you become a governor you are a representative rather than a delegate. This means that if you are elected as a parent governor, or nominated as an LA governor, you **CANNOT** be instructed by parents or your nominating group to take a particular view. On the other hand you and all the other governors have a responsibility to listen to their view and to take it into account.

All governors have a duty to keep in touch with how parents feel about the school. The practical reality is often that it is the parent governors who are most available because other parents meet them more regularly. You need to be quite clear that, when you are talking to parents as a governor, you can only listen to what they are saying and then bring their views to the attention of the whole governing body.

If you are a parent you may feel that you already know your child's school. However, when you become a governor, you are likely to find that there are some areas of the school's activity about which you need to find out more. Most new governors will need some time to settle into their role and nobody will expect you to understand all the issues that come up initially. You should expect to be able to ask questions - and get answers - from other governors and from the Headteacher.

It is sometimes difficult to define where the boundaries are between governing and managing a school. An effective governing body will develop a good working relationship with the Headteacher and the staff of the school. It is not necessary for the governing body, let alone an individual governor, to know every detail. It is important that governors understand that their role is strategic. In particular you will get involved with developing school policies and the School Improvement or Development Plan.

Three Key Roles

The three main roles of the governing body are

- ❑ agreeing the **Strategic Direction** for the school
- ❑ acting as a **Critical Friend**
- ❑ ensuring **Accountability**

Still interested?

If there are parent governor elections at your child's school ask another parent to nominate you or nominate yourself. Have a word with the one of the present governors or the Headteacher if you are unsure what to write about yourself.

If you are not sure about the time commitment find out how many committees there are and how regularly they meet. Ask how long the termly meetings usually last and find out if they are held at a time that is convenient for you.

Minutes of previous meetings are public documents. You may want to look through them to see the sorts of issues being discussed.

A Valuable Contribution

School governors have an important part to play in maintaining and developing our children's education. There is a heavier workload on governors now than there used to be but equally the importance of governors' role has greater recognition.

In Sheffield there is a [Sheffield Association of Governing Bodies](#) which is affiliated to the [National Governors' Association](#). Decision makers at local and national level are taking notice of what governors say.

Advice and Support

If you want to find out more about becoming a school governor you can ring the governors' helpline operated by the Local Authority's Governor Support Team during office hours on 0114 250 7417.

Or visit www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/schoolgovernors

We are particularly keen to hear from potential governors from black and minority ethnic communities and from people who would be prepared to be a governor in areas of the city where vacancies are sometimes more difficult to fill.

[Governorline](#) is a national free helpline service for school governors 08000 722 181