

# **Governance in Church Schools**



THE CHURCH  
OF ENGLAND  
**Diocese of St Edmundsbury  
and Ipswich**



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This booklet is available to download in full from the Diocesan website <http://www.cofesuffolk.org>

Dear Governor,

Welcome to school governance here in the diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich. I hope you will find this booklet helpful.

The principles of good governance are absolutely key to making a difference. The main ingredients needed to transform a team of diverse people, with a range of skills, experience and knowledge into a highly effective Governing Body are:

- The right people around the table
- Understanding of the role and responsibilities
- Good chairing
- Professional clerking
- Good relationships based on trust
- Knowing the school – the data, staff, parents, pupils and the community
- Commitment to asking challenging questions
- Confidence to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people

I hope this booklet proves useful in enabling you to fulfil your responsibilities.

Thank you for becoming a school governor

*Jane Sheat*

Jane Sheat  
Diocesan Director of Education

# The Role of the Governing Body

Up-to-date information can always be obtained from the DfE Governance Handbook:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

The role of the Governing Body is to contribute to the work of the school in ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in the school by:

- **ensuring the clarity of the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction;**
- **holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils and the performance management of the Staff; and**
- **overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.**

The Governing Body is the accountable body. It is responsible for the conduct of the school and for promoting high standards. The Governing Body aims to ensure that children are attending a successful school which provides them with a good education and supports their well-being. As a Church of England school the governors will foster the Christian values and ethos at all times. Decisions made by the governors will always be made in line with the Christian character of the school.

## **To set the strategic direction of the school by:**

- Setting the values, aims and objectives for the school;
- Setting targets;
- Agreeing the improvement strategy which includes monitoring all finances and agreeing the staffing structure.

## **To challenge and support the school by monitoring, reviewing and evaluating:**

- The implementation and effectiveness of the policy framework;
- Progress towards targets;
- The implementation and effectiveness of the improvement strategy;
- The budget and the staffing structure; and
- By conducting self-evaluation.

## **To ensure accountability by:**

- Responding to Ofsted and SIAMS reports when necessary;
- Holding the Headteacher to account for the performance of the school;
- Ensuring parents and pupils are involved, consulted and informed as appropriate;
- Making information available to the community.

# The Role of the Governor

As part of the Governing Body, a governor is expected to:

1. Contribute to the strategic discussions at Governing Body meetings which determine:
  - the implementation of 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.

2. Hold 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 Improvement Plan;
  - considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by the leaders and external sources on all aspects of performance;
  - asking challenging questions;
  - ensuring the Governing Body has implemented the required policies and procedures and that the school is operating effectively according to those policies;
  - listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff and the wider community including local employers.
  
3. When required, serve on panels of governors which include:
  - the appointment of the Headteacher;
  - the Headteacher's performance management;
  - hearing of the appropriate part of staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
  - hearing of appeals about pupil exclusions.

**For Governing Bodies to carry out their role effectively, governors must be:**

- Prepared and equipped to take their responsibilities seriously;
- Prepared to accept the absolute confidentiality of Governing Body meetings;
- Acknowledged as the accountable body by the lead professionals;
- Supported by the appropriate authorities in that task;
- Willing and able to monitor and review their own performance.

**The role of the governor as part of the corporate body**

The Governing Body is a corporate body, which means:

- No governor can act on her/his own without proper authority from the full Governing Body;
- All governors carry equal responsibility for decisions made;
- Although appointed through different routes (e.g. parents, staff, co-opted, PCC/DBE), the overriding concern of all governors has to be the welfare of the school as a whole.

## **The role of a Foundation Governor**

Church schools are unique in having Foundation Governors who represent the historic link with the original establishment of the school and its distinctive religious character.

All Church of England Schools are required to have Foundation Governors. The exact composition of the Governing Body is determined by its Instrument of Government (a copy can be obtained from the clerk or the Diocesan Board of Education).

In **Voluntary Aided** schools Foundation Governors form the majority of the governors. This reflects the financial contribution made to the maintenance and improvement of the buildings, and the requirement that Voluntary Aided schools must provide Christian religious education and worship in accordance with the school's Trust Deed. Being in the majority also provides the ultimate safeguard of the school's distinctive religious character.

In **Voluntary Controlled** schools Foundation Governors are in the minority and cannot exceed more than 25% of the whole Governing Body.

## **Appointing Foundation Governors:**

- The ex officio Foundation Governor has a right of office and is usually the incumbent clergy unless a substitute governor has been nominated by the Archdeacon;
- Foundation Governors are appointed by the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) – normally following consultation with the PCC and/or Archdeacon;
- Foundation governors are recommended by the Parochial Church Council (PCC).

Foundation Governors usually serve a four year term of office which may be renewable. The Church's interest in education stems from a philosophy that education is not just about acquiring knowledge which will enable children to earn a living in a competitive world. It begins from a position that this is God's world and everything in it has value. Religious education is important, but it is not the only subject which reflects spiritual values. The whole curriculum is given value by being considered in this way. Please read the Church of England document: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good

(<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications>)

Foundation Governors are valuable and important to the ministry of the Church, providing the links between the parish, school and diocese. As for any ministry to which people are called, there will be a need for continued professional development such as training to enable them to keep abreast of the changes and developments in the education field and to deepen understanding on any number of issues which a school may face. Our Local Authority (LA) – Suffolk County Council – provides a variety of general courses for all school governors, and in addition the DBE team holds sessions for staff and governors of Church schools periodically.

In addition – Foundation Governors, like all other governors, work to ensure that there is the best possible environment for children's learning and development. They focus on maintaining and improving standards in the school, respecting and involving parents and carers.

## **What being a school governor involves:**

- Formal meetings of the Governing Body – the law requires governing bodies meet at least three times a year but many meet at least twice a term;
- Reading – between meetings governors need to read minutes of the last meeting, agenda of the next meeting supporting papers and documents;
- Committee meetings or working parties – most governing bodies have established committees to undertake various aspects of their work;
- School visits – governors need to visit their school for focussed monitoring and to experience the school in action. Most schools have a policy about visits;
- Training courses – governors should aim to keep themselves well informed and up to date by attending relevant courses arranged by the Local Authority and the Diocese;
- Staffing – involvement in appointments, discipline and redundancy;
- Financial management – Governing Bodies have a duty to set a balanced budget and to monitor and keep spending under review. Schools usually agree a cycle of budget management linked into the School Improvement Plan;
- Governing Bodies should also ensure financial integrity and that their school achieves value for money;
- Pupil exclusions – governors may sit on panels to consider pupil exclusion;
- Policies – ensuring that the school has the correct policies which are approved by the governing body;
- Your contributions – the most important quality that you bring is an interest in the school and in the education of young people together with the skills and knowledge that you have acquired through your life, such as parenting and/or some expertise in a particular area.

Most Governing Bodies have established committees which cover premises, health and safety, curriculum, staffing and finance. They offer an ideal way to put particular skills that you have acquired to good use. Some governing bodies nominate individual governors to specific classes within the school and/or a curriculum subject. Individual governors will also have responsibility for safeguarding and special educational needs.

## **Governing Body meetings**

Governors elect a Chair and Vice-Chair annually at their first meeting of the new academic year. The normal convention of the Chair having a second or casting vote is respected, as is the need for a Chair sometimes to take executive decisions between meetings – these must be fully reported to the whole Governing Body and carefully minuted.

The regular full Governing Body meetings are important for:

- Determining strategy;
- Fulfilling statutory obligations;
- Holding the Headteacher to account for the day-to-day management of the school;
- Making decisions;
- Reviewing performance;
- Considering school problems;
- Encouraging the governing body to work as a team.

Meetings are effective when:

- They start on time;
- Items on the agenda are properly introduced and explained;
- The governors have all read the reports to be considered, and prepared their comments on the reports;
- Everyone is encouraged to participate and is listened to;
- It is clear what actions are taken, by whom and when.

You can play your part by:

- Preparing well for the meeting – read the agenda and other papers;
- Taking papers with you to the meeting;
- Making relevant contributions to the discussions;
- Listening to the contributions of others;
- Accepting the decisions made by the governing body are a collective responsibility;
- Noting any tasks you have agreed to carry out and then fulfilling them;
- Joining a committee and/or taking a special interest in a particular area of school life. You might be asked, on rare occasions, to sit on a pupil or staff discipline committee.

Please remember that if you are unable to attend a meeting you should always tender your apologies to the Clerk.

Governing Body meetings are not usually open to the public. Visitors may attend meetings by invitation but may be asked to leave if a confidential item is discussed. Governors must observe absolute confidentiality at all times regarding the proceedings of the Governing Body; the results of any vote or ballot; and from reports made to the governors as a result of their school visits as governors.

## **Governors' Code of Conduct**

The Governing Body is a corporate body, but individual members agree to be bound by the Code of Conduct drawn up by the National Governors Association:

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Legislation,policies-and-procedures/Model-Policies/Code-of-Practice.aspx>

## Top Tips for Governors

- Governors work as a team and accept collective responsibility;
- Governors must always observe confidentiality, especially on staffing and pupil discipline;
- All governors have equal status;
- Governors need to make a difference and make their views known;
- Governors must attend meetings;
- Governors must not raise issues in a governing body meeting relating to individual children or employees;
- Governors must always be prepared for meetings – read the paperwork beforehand;
- Governors need to be committed and willing to give the time needed;
- Governors must not leave all the work to the head and chair.

## The rewards of being a governor

- The knowledge that you are helping raise standards of educational achievement for children and young people;
- Having an opportunity to use your experience and expertise to help improve the quality of children and young peoples' learning;
- Having a sense of purpose and achievement in the community as well as being a partner and involved in the community;
- Having the opportunity to develop new skills.

## Useful website addresses/links

Department for Education (DfE) Governance Handbook 2020:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

DfE Competency Framework for Governance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

See also Appendix one.

National Governors Association (NGA) Skills audit: <http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Workings-Of-The-Governing-Body/Governance-Tools/Skills-Audit.aspx>

NGA Code of Conduct: <http://www.nga.org.uk/Guidance/Legislation,policies-and-procedures/Model-Policies/Code-of-Practice.aspx>

OfSTED report – Improving Governance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/improving-governance>

Website compliance: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-maintained-schools-must-publish-online>

Statutory school policies: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-policies-for-schools-and-academy-trusts>

Church of England Vision for Education: Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/more/education-and-schools/education-publications>



**Assessment of Governing Body's Effectiveness**

Text from All Party Parliamentary Group on Education Governance and Leadership – 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2015.

**Right skills: Do we have the right skills on the Governing Body?**

1. Have we completed a skills audit which ensure that the Governing Body has all the appropriate skills sets it needs?

*If it does not, you need to have a recruitment strategy*

**Effectiveness: Are we as effective as we could be?**

2. How well do we understand our roles and responsibilities, including what it means to be strategic?

*You need to consider what role you play in developing the School Improvement Plan and the input you have as a body to the strategic direction of the school*

3. Do we have a professional clerk who provides legal advice and oversees the Governing Body's induction and development needs?

4. Is the size, composition and committee structure of our Governing Body conducive to effective working?

*There is no right or wrong answer to this but it is worth considering that people's skills are linked to the various sub-committees*

5. How do we make use of good practice from across the country?

*This is harder but it is useful to speak to other Governing Bodies or to have training that enables you to get tips from how other Governing Bodies work.*

**Role of the Chair: Does our Chair show strong and effective leadership?**

6. Do we carry out a regular 360° review of the chair's performance and elect the chair each year?

*This does not need to be formal but it may be useful to have a small group of governors looking at the role of the Chair – are the meetings run efficiently, does the Chair liaise with the Head and Clerk. Does the Chair delegate well.*

7. Do we engage in good succession planning so that no governor serves for longer than two terms of office and the Chair is replaced at least every six years?

*This may be the ideal but there may be good reasons for people serving longer; if so, you need to be aware what they are: people shouldn't just serve because they always have done - they still need to have the appropriate skills.*

8. Does the Chair carry out an annual review of each governor's contribution to the Governing Body's performance?

*This does not need to be a formal process but might be linked to the skills audit – are we sure we have people with the appropriate skills? If someone needs to step down, is there a sensitive process to enable this to happen?*

**Vision, ethos and strategy**

**Strategy: Does the school have a clear vision and strategic priorities?**

9. Does our vision look forward three to five years, and does it include what the children who have left the school will have achieved?

*Do the Governors (with the Head) have a clear long term vision with measurable targets for the school ?*

10. Have we agreed a strategy with priorities for achieving our vision with key performance indicators against which we can regularly monitor and review the strategy?

*If the governors know where they want to get to, do they know how to get there? Are there milestones along the way that everyone can understand?*

11. How effectively does our strategic planning cycle drive the Governing Body's activities and agenda-setting?

*Do you do things at the right time eg School Improvement Plan summer term, admissions policy Autumn term, look at data from previous year autumn term? Do you know when policies need to be reviewed and who reviews them (sub-committee or full governors)?*

### **Engagement: Are we properly engaged with our school community, the wider school sector and the outside world?**

12. How well do we listen to, understand and respond to our pupils, parents and staff?

*This is not about staff/parent governors but about gauging opinions through such things as questionnaires, visits etc.*

13. How do we make regular reports on the work of the Governing Body to our parents and local community?

*How do you work out what to communicate and what not to?! It is worth reviewing your website regularly.*

14. What benefit does the school draw from collaboration with other schools and other sectors, locally and nationally?

*Lots to include in here potentially: focus on what has worked well and what will help in terms of your strategic plan, although a Christian ethos should run right through this – it is worth here looking at your relationship with the local church and the Diocese.*

### **Effective accountability**

#### **Accountability of the executive: Do we hold the school leaders to account?**

15. How well do we understand the school's performance data (including in-year progress tracking data) so we can properly hold school leaders to account?

*Some governors need to be aware of RAISEONLINE but key points need to be communicated to all governors – but in being aware of issues, what are governors and the school doing about them?*

16. Do governors regularly visit the school to get to know it and monitor the implementation of the school strategy?

*Is there a strategy around visits and how they are recorded? Are governors linked to classes, subject areas or is there some sort of other link that enables governors to visit?*

17. How well does our policy review schedule work and how do we ensure compliance?

*Do you know what you are doing and when?!*

18. Do we know how effective performance management of all staff is within the school?

*You don't need to know details but that it is happening and you need to make sure that there is a group of governors to performance manage the Head.*

19. Are our financial management systems robust so we can ensure best value for money?

*This may be down to the Finance sub-committee but other governors need to be aware it is happening. The Finance sub-committee should get robust information and, if an Academy, be checking end of year accounts and getting budget updates. Also need to be particularly aware of how pupil premium money is spent and this should be communicated to all governors and be on the website.*

#### **Impact: Are we having an impact on outcomes for pupils?**

20. How much has the school improved over the last three years, and what has the Governing Body's contribution been to this?

*Part of the review process – but what about moving forward?*

Support is always available from the DBE Team who are based at the Diocesan offices: St Nicholas Centre, 4 Cutler Street Ipswich IP1 1UQ

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Please also see our pages on the Diocesan website:  
<https://www.cofesuffolk.org/schools/>

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