

Information for prospective governors

Across the city there are thousands of members of our community helping to support school leadership teams by volunteering their time and expertise as school governors - but what is it about the role which encourages so many committed volunteers to apply?

Making a difference

All schools have a Board of Governors that provides strategic leadership. It is responsible for driving up standards, ensuring money is well spent and the strategic vision. Being a school governor is a fantastic opportunity to have an impact on education and positively influence children's lives.

The purpose of governance

All boards, no matter what type of schools or how many schools they govern, have three core functions:

- 1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;**
- 2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and**
- 3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.**

[The Governance Handbook](#) (January 2017)

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

Knowledge and Skills

Effective governance

'Effective governance provides strategic direction and control to schools, academies and Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs). It creates robust accountability, oversight and assurance for their educational and financial performance and is ambitious for all children and young people to achieve the very best outcomes.'

[A Competency Framework for Governors](#) (January 2017)

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

Skills and effective behaviours

The Department for Education's Competency Framework lists the following skills and behaviours as being required for effectiveness in setting the strategic direction of the organisation, planning and prioritising, monitoring progress and managing change:

- thinks strategically and contributes to the development of the organisation's strategy
- can articulate the organisation's strategic priorities (and where appropriate, charitable objects) and explain how these inform goals

- supports strategic change having challenged as appropriate so that change is in the best interests of children, young people and the organisation (and aligned with charitable objects, where appropriate)
- can put in place plans for monitoring progress towards strategic goals
- is able to champion the reasons for, and benefits of, change to all stakeholders

What qualities make an effective governor?

- a strong commitment to the role and to improving outcomes for children
- the inquisitiveness to question and analyse
- the willingness to learn
- good inter-personal skills
- appropriate levels of literacy in English (unless a governing body is prepared to make special arrangements)
- sufficient numeracy skills to understand basic data
- willingness to attend appropriate training
- The competency framework requires governors to have the following skills and effective behaviours:

Principles and personal attributes

The principles and personal attributes that individuals bring to the board are as important as their skills and knowledge. These qualities enable board members to use their skills and knowledge to function well as part of a team and make an active contribution to effective governance.

All those elected or appointed to boards should fulfil their duties in line with the seven principles of public life (the Nolan principles). They should also be mindful of their responsibilities under equality legislation, recognising and encouraging diversity and inclusion. They should understand the impact of effective governance on the quality of education and on outcomes for all children and young people. Please see appendix 2

Improve your knowledge about the education sector.

As a new school governor, you are not expected to come with a working knowledge of the education sector. This role will allow you will gain a fascinating insight into how schools work and how the education sector is changing and continues to change. You are guaranteed to gain a further appreciation of the work of teachers and school leaders as well as the type of challenges schools face.

It's a challenge.

There's no denying that being a school governor is a challenge, but that's a good thing - because it's important. It may be that you are putting your professional skills to use in a new context or getting to grips with a whole new sector, but most governors find this very rewarding.

The fact that the role is so enjoyable is probably one of the main reasons why there are so many governors giving up their time to help.

Types of governors

You do not need to be a parent of a child to be a school governor. However, anyone applying to become a governor should ensure that they are not disqualified on the grounds given in Appendix 1.

There are many different categories of governor including:

- Co-opted – appointed by the Board and the most common type.
- Parent – elected by the parents
- Staff – elected by the staff
- Foundation – appointed by the Diocese/ Trust (voluntary controlled, voluntary aided and trust schools only)
- Local Authority - appointed by the Board with the agreement of the LA

The type of governor you will become depends on your situation; however all governors have the same roles and responsibilities once part of the governing body. The headteacher or chair of governors should inform prospective candidates as to the nature of the role and secure agreement to the school's code of conduct for the governing body.

Parent governors

Parent governors are elected by other parents at the school/ academy. Any parent, or carer, of a child registered at the school at the time of election is eligible to stand as a parent governor. Parent governors are there to govern the school in the best interests of the pupils, not to try and represent the interest of all other parents. Notification should be sent out by the headteacher when a vacancy arises.

Staff governors

Teaching and support staff who, at the time of election, are employed either by the governing body or the local authority to work at the school under a contract of employment, are eligible to be staff governors. Staff governors are elected by the staff at the school and cease to hold office when they cease to work at the school. The role of staff governors is not to stand alongside the headteacher in being held to account by the governing body, or to represent staff, but to operate as part of the governing body to provide strategic leadership and hold the headteacher to account.

Local authority governors

Local authority governors are nominated by the local authority but appointed by the governing body on the basis of the skills and experience required. In Leeds the local authority governor nominations will in the first instance come through the relevant political party. As with other categories of governors, local authority governors must operate in the best interest of pupils not as representatives to lobby on behalf of their constituency. An individual eligible to be a staff governor at the school may not be appointed as a local authority governor.

Co-opted governors

This category of governor is appointed by the governing body. They are people who in the opinion of the governing body have the skills required to contribute to the effective governance of successful schools.

Foundation governors

Foundation governors are appointed by the body identified in the Instrument of Government; this could be the church or a trust. A foundation governor is someone who, in the opinion of the person entitled to appoint them, has the skills to contribute to effective governance and success of the school. Foundation governors should also ensure that the school's character (including religious character where there is one) is preserved and developed and that the school is conducted in accordance with the foundation's governing documents.

Training and Time commitment

Training

The regulations set clear expectations that the governors' role is one of professionalism. The expectations include that governors undertake whatever training or development activity is needed to fill any gaps in the skills they have to contribute to effective governance. The governing body should therefore make sure that governors are made aware of induction and any other training that they may need. Governors who persistently fail to take up the training required may be sanctioned in accordance with the code of conduct.

What is the time commitment?

The average is 10-15 hours per term; this includes attending meetings, background reading and school visits. Governors are expected to take an interest in the life of the school, to attend some of its events during the academic year and to see something of the school at work.

Being a governor is a public duty and governors have a right to reasonable time off work, although this may be without pay. You should look at your company's policy to see what entitlement you have.

How to find out more

If you would like further information on how to become a governor contact us on: education.governors@leeds.gov.uk or 0113 378 5213.

You can also complete the governor application form, on the documents section of our webpage <http://www.leedsforlearning.co.uk/Page/2253> and return to education.governors@leeds.gov.uk

Appendix 1

Qualifications and disqualifications (regulation 17 and Schedule 4 to the Regulations)

Grounds for disqualification fall into three broad categories:

1. **general grounds;**
2. **grounds that apply to particular categories of governor; and**
3. **grounds that arise because of particular failings or actions on the part of the governor.**

All the grounds for disqualification apply also to associate members except that associate members can be registered pupils at the school and can be under 18.

1. General grounds

Registered pupils cannot be governors.

A governor must be aged 18 or over at the time of election or appointment.

A person cannot hold more than one governor post at the same school at the same time.

2. Grounds that apply to particular categories of governor

A person is disqualified from being a parent governor if they are an elected member of the LA or paid to work at the school for more than 500 hours (i.e. for more than one-third of the hours of a full-time equivalent) in any consecutive twelve month period (at the time of election or appointment).

A person is disqualified from being a local authority governor if they are eligible to be a staff governor at the school.

A person is disqualified from being a partnership governor if they are:

- a parent of a registered pupil at the school;
- eligible to be a staff governor at the school;
- an elected member of the LA; or
- employed by the local authority in connection with its education functions.

3. Grounds that arise because of particular failings or actions on the part of the governor

A person is disqualified from being a governor of a particular school if they have failed to attend the meetings of the governing body of that school for a continuous period of six months, beginning with the date of the first meeting they failed to attend, without the consent of the governing body. This does not apply to the headteacher or to foundation governors appointed by virtue of their office.

A foundation, local authority, co-opted or partnership governor at the school who is disqualified for failing to attend meetings is only disqualified from being a governor of any category at the school during the twelve month period starting on the date on which they were disqualified.

A person is disqualified from holding or continuing to hold office if that person:

- is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order, debt relief restrictions order, an interim debt relief restrictions order or their estate has been sequestrated and the sequestration has not been discharged, annulled or reduced
- is subject to a disqualification order or disqualification undertaking under the Company Directors Disqualification Act 1986, a disqualification order under Part 2 of the Companies (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, a disqualification undertaking accepted under the Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, or an order made under section 429(2)(b) of the Insolvency Act 1986 (failure to pay under county court administration order)
- has been removed from the office of charity trustee or trustee for a charity by the Charity Commission or Commissioners or High Court on grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement, or under section 34 of the Charities and Trustee Investment (Scotland) Act 2005 from being concerned in the management or control of any body
- is included in the list of people considered by the Secretary of State as unsuitable to work with children or young people
- is barred from any regulated activity relating to children
- is subject to a direction of the Secretary of State under section 142 of the Education Act 2002 or section 128 of the Education and Skills Act 2008
- is disqualified from working with children or from registering for child-minding or providing day care
- is disqualified from being an independent school proprietor, teacher or employee by the Secretary of State
- has been sentenced to three months or more in prison (without the option of a fine) in the five years before becoming a governor or since becoming a governor (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has received a prison sentence of two and a half years or more in the 20 years before becoming a governor (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has at any time received a prison sentence of five years or more (subject to certain overseas offences that do not correlate with a UK offence)
- has been convicted and fined for causing a nuisance or disturbance on school or educational premises during the five years prior to or since appointment or election as a governor
- refuses a request by the clerk to make an application to the Disclosure and Barring Service for a criminal records certificate.
- has been removed from a governing board during their term as an elected parent or staff governor within the last five years (from date of removal).

Anyone proposed or serving as a governor who is disqualified for one of these reasons must notify the clerk to the governing body.

Appendix 2

The Nolan Principles

In 1994, the UK government established a Committee on Standards in Public Life. The committee was chaired by Lord Nolan, and was tasked with making recommendations to improve standards of behaviour in public life. The first report of the committee established the seven principles of public life, also known as the “Nolan principles”.

The seven principles are outlined below:

- **Selflessness** – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.
- **Integrity** – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.
- **Objectivity** – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.
- **Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.
- **Openness** – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.
- **Honesty** – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.
- **Leadership** – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

You’d be hard-pushed to find anyone to argue against such noble values, but are they enough in and of themselves to ensure good behaviour in public life?

The Nolan principles were revolutionary at the time because they focused on behaviour and culture, rather than processes. Therefore if someone lives by these values, it will go a long way to improving behaviour. The welcome side-effect is a board which has a tighter rein on processes and compliance, leading to a win-win situation. If you are really practicing accountability, integrity and leadership, you will ensure your organisation has a strategic plan in place, is spending public money wisely and is delivering exceptional service for all customers. If you are selfless and honest, you will be making decisions which are in the interests of the organisation, putting aside any personal interest and acting objectively and independently. Organisations which are open have been shown to have more stakeholder involvement in the planning process, leading to enhanced public service.