

# School Governor Services

## Information Pack



**for new  
governors**

Welcome!

Welcome to your new role as a school governor and thank you for volunteering your time and energy to making a real difference to the lives of young people in Liverpool. Liverpool has over 2,500 school governors, all volunteers, making important decisions about the way their school is run. In your new role you will be able to contribute to your school's success by working with fellow governors, including the headteacher and staff at the school, to raise standards and ensure that every child reaches their full potential.

Effective governance involves team-work with the headteacher, staff, governors and the community. An effective governor is committed to the school, ready to ask questions and act as a 'critical friend'. This pack has been developed to provide basic information to help get you started and asking the right questions.

In Liverpool we have always valued the contribution of school governors and offer a wide range of services including training, clerking and support and advice on any aspect of school governance - the contact details of the School Governor Services team can be found on the back cover. Please do not hesitate to telephone or email us if you have a query.

Governors' News is our termly newsletter and is sent direct to you. As well as news and articles on school governance it also outlines our programme of briefings and training sessions for governors - an important way to keep on top of developments.

Governors don't pay for training; schools receive money for training and development which includes governors. Schools are usually more than happy to support governors in developing their role.

I do hope you find being a school governor interesting and rewarding.

Dave Cadwallader  
School Governor Services Officer

## The Role of the School Governor

This information pack is intended to complement the induction course for new governors, *The Role of the School Governor*.

This course is an important element of a governor's induction and it is recommended that all new governors attend.

The course is informal, non-threatening (you won't be put on the spot!) and provides a forum for participants to discuss how best to approach being a governor and to ask questions about their new role.

The course covers:

- types of schools
- categories of governor
- powers and duties of governing bodies
- school development plans
- effective governing bodies
- monitoring and evaluation
- organisation and procedures of meetings
- why, how and to whom are schools accountable?
- the Headteacher's report to the governing body
- dealing with complaints against the school

The course is held termly. Details can be found in *Governors' News*.

## The role of the governing body

School governors are the largest volunteer workforce nationally with over 300,000 school governors in England.

The governing body carries out its functions with the aim of taking a largely strategic role in the running of the school. This includes:

- setting up a strategic framework for the school
- setting aims and objectives for the school
- agreeing policies and targets for achieving the objectives
- reviewing progress and reviewing the strategic framework in the light of progress
- ensuring accountability to stakeholders

The governing body acts as a “critical friend” to the head teacher by providing support and challenge.

The headteacher is responsible for the day-to-day, management and control of the school and the implementation of the strategic framework established by the governing body.

The governors and Headteacher work together in partnership to raise standards in the school.

## Categories of governor

### Parent Governors

Parents, including carers, of pupils at the school are eligible to stand for governorship at the school. Parent governors are elected by other parents at the school. If insufficient parents stand for election, the governing body can appoint parent governors.

### Staff Governors

Both teaching and non-teaching staff are eligible for staff governorship. Staff governors are elected by the school staff and must be paid to work at the school -volunteers are not eligible. The headteacher is a member of the governing body by virtue of his/her office and counts as a member of the staff category.

### Authority Governors

LA governors are appointed by the Local Authority. In Liverpool, the City Council is the appointing body.

### Community Governors

Community governors are appointed by the governing body to represent community interests, including the business community.

### Foundation Governors

Foundation governors are appointed by the school's founding body, usually diocese or trust. If the school has a religious character the foundation governors must preserve and develop this.

### Sponsor Governors

Persons who give substantial assistance to the school, financially or in kind, or who provide services to the school can be appointed by the governing body as sponsor governors.

### Associate Members

The governing body can appoint associate members to attend full governing body meetings in a non-voting capacity. Associate members may serve on one or more governing body committees with limited voting rights.

## Types of schools

**Maintained schools** are state-funded schools that are under the responsibility of their local authorities. There are four types: community schools, voluntary aided schools, voluntary controlled schools, and foundation schools (including trust schools).

**Community schools** are those whose premises are owned by the local authority, which also legally employs the staff and determines admissions arrangements. This is the largest category of schools in the country.

**Voluntary Aided and Voluntary Controlled** schools are usually closely linked to a Church. In the case of voluntary aided schools the Church owns the premises, is responsible for paying 10 percent of the capital costs, and appoints the majority of the governors. The premises of voluntary controlled schools may be owned by the Church but the local authority pays all the capital costs, is legally the employer of the staff, and only a minority of governors are appointed by the Church. The local authority also determines the admissions arrangements, which are controlled by the governing body in voluntary aided schools.

**Foundation schools** are more independent of the local authority than community schools, particularly with regards to legally being the employer of the staff, and setting the admissions criteria for the school. The premises of Foundation schools are held on trust by a foundation, a “foundation body” or by the governing body. However, the school has to follow the national pay rates for staff, teach the National Curriculum, and follow the local authority’s term dates. The local authority has the power to intervene if it considers that standards are not adequate.

**Trust** schools are foundation schools supported by a trust (some foundation schools do not have them). The trust is the body that owns the school’s premises. A single trust may own the land for several schools, and the schools usually then work closely together. The trust may have a particular ethos, such as a religious one. The term “Trust School” is often used for what is referred to in legislation as a “Qualifying Foundation School”, which is one where the trust appoints the majority of governors, rather than following the model for foundation schools. In such cases the governing body only has one elected parent governor.

### Academies

Publicly funded independent schools. Unlike other publicly funded schools, Academies are independent of local authorities and receive their funds from central government. They set their own pay and conditions for staff, do not have to follow the National Curriculum, and can determine their term dates and the length of their school days. Academy status is now open to both secondary and primary schools and a sponsor is no longer required. School land and buildings are owned by a trust. The trust also appoints the governing body, which is not subject to the same constitutional and procedural legislation as those in maintained schools.

### Free Schools

Independent schools funded by the state that have been set up in response to parental demand. Free schools will have academy status and hence will have the same independence. Parents, charities, businesses or groups of teachers may set up free schools. However, they will not run them – the schools will have governing bodies. Free schools may be set up in existing, adapted buildings such as offices.

## Roles at meetings of the governing body

All governors are of equal status having equal rights to contribute to discussions. There are however some roles which are defined and which carry specific responsibilities. These include:

### Chair

The chair, and deputy chair, are elected by the governors. Any governor is eligible to stand as chair except for those employed at the school. In certain circumstances the chair can, in an emergency, make a decision on behalf of the governing body.

### Clerk

The clerk is not a governor and is not entitled to vote. The clerk is appointed by the governing body to be responsible for all matters relating to communication: minutes, agenda, correspondence, etc. The clerk cannot be the head or a governor. A governor (but not the head) can act as clerk in an emergency.

### Specialist Governors

Many governing bodies have individual governors who cover specific areas of responsibility; these can include:

- Child Protection
- Special Educational Needs
- Inclusion
- Looked After Children
- Governing Body Training and Development

If you feel you have skills or experience which may benefit a particular committee or specialist area be sure to let your governing body know!

## What will be discussed at the meeting?

An agenda for the meeting will be sent to you at least seven days before the meeting indicating the items to be discussed. The agenda for the termly business meeting will usually include the following items:

### *Apologies for absence*

It is courteous to always send apologies if you are unable to attend a meeting.

### *Minutes*

Minutes of previous meetings have to be accepted by the governors as a true record and signed as such by the chair. Any inaccuracies in the minutes can be raised under this item.

### *Matters arising*

Allows governors to be updated on action taken on issues raised at the previous meeting.

### *Headteacher's report*

This important item allows governors to be informed about the organisation and activities of the school. It should contain sufficient information to enable you to know whether or not your responsibilities are being met.

### *Any other business*

Issues that have arisen since the publication of the agenda may be discussed under this item if considered important enough.

Other items will appear on the agenda usually with accompanying papers.

Any governor can raise an item for inclusion on the agenda by contacting the chair.

Reading papers ahead of the meeting will allow you to reflect on the information issued to you, prepare questions for the meeting or contribute effectively to the debate.

## How business is conducted

### Meetings

Governing bodies are required to meet three times a year although many meet more frequently. The venue, date and timing of the meeting is at the discretion of the governors. Please make every effort to attend all meetings.

Every member of the governing body must be given at least seven days' written notice of the time and date of the meeting. In advance of the meeting you should also receive minutes of the previous meeting and other papers to be considered, for example the head's report or committee reports. Sometimes papers are tabled at the meeting but this makes them harder to consider.

It is normal for the chair or headteacher to make contact with you ahead of your first meeting to provide preliminary information about how the governing body operates. At your first meeting try to arrive early in order to meet your fellow governors and the clerk before the meeting starts. The chair or head will introduce you.

### Format

Some governing bodies operate on a formal basis whilst others prefer a more relaxed atmosphere especially if governors know each other well.

The chair is responsible for setting the tone of the meeting, ensuring that one person speaks at any one time, inviting questions and allowing every governor to have his/her say on the matter in hand.

Voting is not always needed because decisions are often reached by general

agreement. Should a vote be required a show of hands usually suffices although there may be times when the governing body feels a secret ballot is necessary.

You should always declare an interest, and if necessary withdraw from the meeting if you feel you have a personal interest in the outcome of a discussion.

### Incorporation

Governing bodies are *incorporated* so that they have a separate legal identity. Providing the governing body acts with reasonable care and within the law, its members are not personally liable for any financial loss caused by its actions.

Except where the governing body delegates specific tasks or functions to a committee or individual, governors discharge their responsibilities collectively.

### Committees

Most governing bodies have established a committee structure to help deal more effectively with their workload. Committees are commonly used to cover areas such as staffing, finance, buildings, and school standards. *Ad hoc* committees may also be set up to deal with such issues as staff appointments, complaints and pupil exclusions.

The Guide to the Law for School Governors sets out those responsibilities which may or may not be delegated and the constitution and procedures of committees.

## Visiting the school

A visit to the school will allow you to get to know more about school life and will demonstrate to staff and pupils that you take your responsibilities seriously.

The headteacher may invite governors to Christmas concerts, sports days, school trips, etc. Accepting invitations gives you the chance to visit and become involved.

You may also ask the head to provide you with an initial insight into the school's activities.

In the case of all visits the first step is to contact the head and make an appointment. Give some indication of what you would like to see and how long you expect the visit to last.

The head could arrange for you to have a guided tour of the school to provide you with an overview of the premises and resources. In large schools you may not have time to see everything but you should see enough to give you an impression of

the facilities available both to pupils and staff.

An introduction to members of staff will give you the opportunity to speak to them and to ask any questions you may have.

Ahead of the visit you may wish to draw up a list of questions. If you have an interest in a particular aspect of the school (a curriculum subject or building and grounds, for example) you could let the head know of this in order that the visit may better reflect this interest.

Some schools have a policy on visits by governors to enable them to be more structured and purposeful.

With all visits, please remember:

- A governor does not have an automatic right to visit the school;
- On arrival report to the school office;
- Visits make demands on your time and that of staff at the school. It is important to ensure that your visit is useful to the work of the governing body.

## Collecting information from the school

The documents listed below provide information that should be readily available but will help you to build up a picture of your school.

The information can be obtained from either the head or clerk to the governing body.

### About the School

The headteacher should be able to provide:

- A list of school staff and their responsibilities
- A plan of the school site and building
- A calendar of events for the school year

- The most recent Ofsted inspection report and the governing body's response
- The School Development Plan (SDP)
- School policies
- Recent newsletters to parents

### About the Governing Body

The clerk should be able to provide:

- Names and categories of fellow governors
- Committee membership and terms of reference
- Minutes and supporting documents of previous meetings

## Key characteristics of effective governing bodies

- Positive relationships between governors and school leaders are based on trust, openness and transparency. Effective governing bodies systematically monitor their school's progress towards meeting agreed development targets. Information about what is going well and why, and what is not going well and why, is shared. Governors consistently ask for more information, explanation or clarification. This makes a strong contribution to robust planning for improvement.
- Governors are well informed and knowledgeable because they are given high- quality, accurate information that is concise and focused on pupil achievement. This information is made accessible by being presented in a wide variety of formats, including charts and graphs.
- Outstanding governors are able to take and support hard decisions in the interests of pupils: to back the head teacher when they need to change staff, or to change the head teacher when absolutely necessary.
- Outstanding governance supports honest, insightful self-evaluation by the school, recognising problems and supporting the steps needed to address them.
- Absolute clarity about the different roles and responsibilities of the headteacher and governors underpins the most effective governance. Protocols, specific duties and terms of reference are made explicit in written documents.
- Effective governing bodies are driven by a core of key governors such as the chair and chairs of committees. They see themselves as part of a team and build strong relationships with the headteacher, senior leaders and other governors.
- In eight of the 14 schools visited, governors routinely attend lessons to gather information about the school at work. All the governors who were interviewed visit their schools regularly and talk with staff, pupils and parents. Clear protocols for visits ensure that the purpose is understood by school staff and governors alike. Alongside the information they are given about the school, these protocols help them to make informed decisions, ask searching questions and provide meaningful support.
- School leaders and governors behave with integrity and are mutually supportive. School leaders recognise that governors provide them with a different perspective which contributes to strengthening leadership. The questions they ask challenge assumptions and support effective decision-making.
- Governors in the schools visited, use the skills they bring, and the information they have about the school, to ask challenging questions, which are focused on improvement, and hold leaders to account for pupils' outcomes.
- Time is used efficiently by governors because there are clear procedures for delegating tasks, for example to well organised committees. These committees have clear terms of reference, provide high levels of challenge and use governors' expertise to best effect. Systems are in place for sharing information and reporting back to the full governing body. This does not merely reiterate what has already been discussed in detail by the committee but focuses on the key points and decisions.
- The role of the clerk to the governors is pivotal to ensuring that statutory duties are met, meetings are well organised and governors receive the information they need in good time. Consequently, governors come to meetings well prepared and with pertinent questions ready so that they are able to provide constructive challenge.
- A detailed timeline of activities, maintained by the clerk and linked to the school development plan, provides a clear structure for the work of governors and ensures that their time is used appropriately.
- Governors in the schools visited, use their external networks and professional contacts to fill any identified gaps in the collective skills of the governing body.
- There are clear induction procedures for new governors which help them to understand their roles and responsibilities and ensure that best use is made of their varied skills and expertise.
- The governing bodies constantly reflect on their own effectiveness and readily make changes to improve. They consider their own training needs, as well as how they organise their work.

(Source: *School governance: learning from the best; Ofsted 2011*)

## **Schools Financial Value Standard (SFVS)**

### **What is the SFVS?**

Schools manage many billions of pounds of public money each year. Effective financial management ensures this money is spent wisely and properly, and allows schools to optimise their resources to provide high-quality teaching and learning and so raise standards and attainment for all their pupils. The SFVS has been designed in conjunction with schools to assist them in managing their finances and to give assurance that they have secure financial management in place.

### **Who is the SFVS for?**

The standard is a requirement for local authority maintained schools. Other schools are welcome to use any of the material associated with the standard, if they would find it useful. Governing bodies have formal responsibility for the financial management of their schools, and so the standard is primarily aimed at governors.

### **What do schools need to do?**

The standard consists of 23 questions which governing bodies should formally discuss annually with the head teacher and senior staff.

Where necessary, governors should summarise remedial actions and the timetable for reporting back. Governors should ensure that each action has a specified deadline and an agreed owner.

The governing body may delegate the consideration of the questions to a finance or other relevant committee, but a detailed report should be provided to the full governing body and the chair of governors must sign the completed form.

The school must send a copy of the signed standard to their local authority's finance department.

There is no prescription of the level of evidence that the governing body should require. The important thing is that governors are confident about their responses.

### **What is the role of local authorities (LAs)?**

The SFVS is not externally assessed. LAs should use schools' SFVS returns to inform their programme of financial assessment and audit. LA and other auditors will have access to the standard, and when they conduct an audit can check whether the self-assessment is in line with their own judgement. Auditors should make the governing body and the LA aware of any major discrepancies in judgements.

## **A Guide to the Law for School Governors**

Setting out the statutory requirements relating to governing body responsibilities, the Guide is available in Word or pdf format and can be downloaded from the Department for Education website: [www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance)

## Useful websites

### Department for Education (DfE)

#### School Governors pages

(includes a useful A-Z of terms)

[www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance](http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/governance)

### National Governors' Association (NGA)

[www.nga.org.uk/](http://www.nga.org.uk/)

### Ofsted

[www.ofsted.gov.uk/](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/)

### Information for School and College Governors (ISCG)

[www.governors.uk.com](http://www.governors.uk.com)

### TES Forum for Governors

[community.tes.co.uk/forums/17.aspx](http://community.tes.co.uk/forums/17.aspx)

### National College for School Leadership

[www.nationalcollege.org.uk/](http://www.nationalcollege.org.uk/)

### UK Governors

[forums.ukgovernors.org.uk/](http://forums.ukgovernors.org.uk/)

## Liverpool Governors' Forum (LGF)



The Liverpool Governors' Forum was formed to represent the views of member governing bodies from Liverpool schools by:

- liaising with all bodies connected with education, both locally and nationally;
- providing a forum for discussion and mutual assistance;
- promoting best practice in fulfilling statutory and other responsibilities with sensitivity;
- raising awareness of educational issues;
- providing a basis for pursuing common ideals and objectives.

To contact LGF or to access its discussion board visit the website: [www.livgovforum.org](http://www.livgovforum.org)

# EDnet

<https://ednet.liverpool.gov.uk>

**EDnet**

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## What's New

Check out what's new this week in Key Information

**Vacancies**  
Search for teaching and non-teaching vacancies online.

**Headteacher Letters**  
Read downloadable versions of letters sent to schools.

**Schools A to Z**  
Contact details for Schools and Educational establishments.

**LearnED**  
Already know which event you want to attend? Book online.

**Term Dates**  
Term dates for 2011/12, 2012/13 & 2013/14 are now available

## Latest News

Welcome to all our LTP colleagues in Merseyside- NQT Induction information can be found under **Staff & Governors**

The revised guidance and eligibility criteria for **Free Early Education for 2 years old children** (MS Word - 176.5Kb) is now available.

**Save the Dates** ...further details are now available for a number of Conferences running this Summer/Autumn 2012

Could your primary school make use of the **School Admissions Choice Advisory Service**?

A major upgrade of EDnet is planned for September 2012...would you like to help shape the future content and design? e-mail [ednet@liverpool.gov.uk](mailto:ednet@liverpool.gov.uk) to express and interest and we'll be in touch with details of how to get involved soon!

**BBC Education Latest News**

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**EDnet is a secure website that enables school governors to access information that previously was only available via the corporate *Intranet* system.**

Governors can logon to EDnet from any PC with internet access (for example from home, work, at a library or an internet café) using an individual username and password issued by your school.

EDnet simplifies and streamlines communications between the local authority and school based staff and governors. In addition to pages dedicated to school governors, the site includes information on curriculum, data, finance, health and safety, Service Level Agreements, vacancies, courses, pastoral care, local and national developments (including consultations) and much more.

The site will continue to evolve and develop to meet the needs of staff and governing bodies and, to this end, feedback and ideas on how to improve the site is welcomed. Governors wishing to give feedback on EDnet can e-mail [ednet@liverpool.gov.uk](mailto:ednet@liverpool.gov.uk)

**Governors who haven't yet received a logon should contact their school administrative officer directly.**

## School Governor Services

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on any aspect of school governance.

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