

The Role of the Parent Governor

All governing boards have to have parent governors.

Anyone who has parental responsibility for a pupil on the school roll at the time of election can stand for election and can vote in the election. A parent who works for the school for 500 hours or more per year or a parent who is an elected member of the local authority is not eligible to stand for election but they are permitted to nominate and vote. If insufficient parents stand for election the governing board can appoint parents to the governing board. The term of office for a parent governor is specified in the school's Instrument of Government. For The Willows Primary School the term is four years, although a governor can stand down at any time.

Why become a parent governor?

Parents who have a child at the school and who take an active interest in the education of all children at the school should consider becoming a parent governor. They should not take on this role because they have a particular concern about the education of an individual child.

Parents may have a useful skill such as an expertise in finance that can be useful to the governing board. It is useful for parents to talk to other parent governors to find out what they think about the role and what is really involved before deciding if the role is one which they would like to take on.

What have they found challenging? What have they found rewarding?

What will parent governors have to do?

- take an active interest in education
- give time to find out about your school
- give time to learn about the role by attending induction training
- attend meetings throughout the year (usually in the evening but occasionally meetings have to take place during the school day)
- abide by the Code of Conduct and respect confidentiality
- undergo the pre-appointment checks including a DBS check, signing a Declaration of Eligibility form and completing a register of pecuniary interest.

The Strategic Role

The role of a parent governor is essentially the same as that of a governor from any other category. Some of the ways in which governors work together strategically:

- monitoring the schools' performance and working to raise standards and promote pupil welfare
- ensuring that the school is improving the achievement and attainment of all children
- making sure that pupils with special needs are properly catered for
- dealing with disciplinary issues of pupils and staff
- appointing the Head teacher
- monitoring work-life balance of the staff and Head teacher
- setting the budget
- helping to formulate policies
- accountability to parents by ensuring they have the information they are legally entitled to
- dealing with problems and agreeing solutions
- determining curriculum policy
- ensuring the school has sound self-evaluation processes in place

Collective Responsibility

All governors have equal status. They act collectively to support the school strategically. They participate in and contribute towards shared decisions. Once decisions have been made even if a governor does not personally agree with these they must act collectively to support these decisions in a united way.

Support and Challenge

Governors support the school but are also prepared to question why decisions have been made and request information about the school to help them in their monitoring role.

The Head teacher's Operational Role

Parent governors and other categories of governors may become involved in other aspects of school life. They may visit the school to help in various capacities such as hearing children read. What governors must not do is get involved with operational decisions. The Head teacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school.

Sometimes it can be difficult to decide where the strategic role ends and the operational one begins. There is a wealth of information available to governors to help them understand their role. Governors should attend Induction training to help them understand their role.

Diplomacy and Confidentiality

The role requires diplomacy, adherence to a Code of Conduct and, particularly, confidentiality.

The role can be a difficult one at times. A parent may have to wear two hats: one for while raising issues about their own children as a parent and not a governor, with the class teacher or Head teacher, and the other as a parent governor raising issues at governing board meetings that represent a parent perspective.

The Playground

Being a parent governor and being in contact with other parents maybe in the playground before and after school can mean that a parent governor has to be particularly careful regarding issues of confidentiality and professionalism. It is important to keep the role of governor separate from personal feelings when given information about individuals. Similarly, a parent governor may be involved in discussions of a confidential nature during the course of a governing board meeting and these discussions may concern a particular individual. Names would not normally be disclosed at meetings but inevitably at some time a parent governor may become aware about issues surrounding an individual child or member of staff. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance in these circumstances.

A parent governor may be involved in a disciplinary case and would have to declare an interest to other members of the governing board if they had had contact with a child or teacher involved with the case. Parent governors need to be familiar with the school's complaints procedure.

Communicating with Parents and Representing Parents

A parent governor has a duty to communicate concerns and feelings expressed by parents to other members of the governing board. However, a parent governor is not a delegate who attends meetings with instructions on how to vote on any particular issue. A parent governor is a representative parent and should vote on issues at meetings in the best interests of the school and according to his/her own conscience.

If a particular issue is raised and brought to the attention of a parent governor, this should be referred to the whole governing board to discuss and decide collectively how to act. A parent governor takes account of what parents are thinking and then makes a decision about what he/she feels is in the best interests of the school.

Communication between governors, parents, pupils and teachers is very important. Some of the ways for this to happen are:

- photographs of all governors may be placed in a prominent place in the school
- newsletters may be sent regularly to parents
- an annual parents' meeting (no longer a statutory requirement)
- attending School Council meetings
- meeting parents at school events
- meeting teachers and pupils on school visits

Induction and Support

One of the most important ways to ensure that governors are clear about their role is for them to receive good, sound induction as soon as possible following their appointment. This will include general induction to the role by attending local authority induction training, and in-school induction to their own governing board from the Head teacher, the Chair of governors and a mentor governor.

Message from a current parent governor

My daughter attends The Willows and I wanted to be able to contribute to the life of the school. The opportunity to be a parent governor was great for me as I work full time, so the commitment of one meeting every month and a day in school 3 times a year is really manageable. The role of the Governors is not to tell the school what to do - this is the responsibility of the school leadership team. Our role is to provide strategic direction - which sounds complicated, but just means that we contribute ideas to help the school to continue to improve and make good progress. Parent governors help school leaders understand how decisions, such as how school money is spent, might affect families. The role of the parent governor is equal to the role of any other governor and I feel that my views are heard and respected. As long as you have a child at The Willows, anyone can be a parent governor - we all have skills and qualities that we can bring to the role. All that is essential is the commitment to supporting our brilliant school to deliver the best educational experiences and outcomes for our children. I really enjoy being part of meetings and hearing about all the exciting things that are happening in the school, and attending Governor days in school to meet the staff and children to see these things in action.