

# Information for prospective governors and trustees

## What do governors and trustees do?

Governors and trustees are volunteers who are responsible for strategic leadership and accountability within schools and academies. Their key functions are to:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school or academy and its pupils
- oversee the financial performance of the school or academy and make sure its money is well spent

In practise, this means that governing boards are responsible for such things as:

- setting policies and ensuring they are adhered to
- setting and monitoring the budget
- monitoring the progress that the school or academy is making
- setting targets for school improvement
- appointing the headteacher

and many other decisions regarding the strategic direction of the school or academy. All decisions are made as a group, with all board members having equal rights and status.

Governors and trustees are not involved in the operational running of the school or academy. The daily management is the responsibility of the headteacher. Governing boards are accountable to several “stakeholders” for the way in which the school or academy is managed, including parents, pupils, the local community and OFSTED.

## What happens at governing board meetings?

Everything a governing board does is decided at a meeting. These meetings vary in formality and frequency depending on the nature of the governing board. Schools hold full governing body meetings and academies hold board of director meetings at least three times a year.

Governing boards will decide annually what committees they need. Usually these fall into categories such as curriculum and standards; staffing; finance; and premises. Sometimes one committee will cover more than one area to suit the needs of the school or academy. The governing board can delegate decision-making powers to committees which reduces the amount of work carried out at board level. In academies, the frequency of local governing committee meetings will be dependent on the level of responsibility delegated by the multi academy trust board of directors.

## Who can become a governor or trustee?

There is a formal list of people who are disqualified from becoming a governor or trustee included within the governor application form. Apart from these disqualifications, however, almost anyone over the age of 18 can apply to become a governor or trustee if they have the skills and experience to offer the governing board.

## Categories of governor and trustee and how they are elected/appointed

Governing boards vary in size and composition, depending on the setting, but the number of governors or trustees in each category is set by law. In maintained schools this information is listed in the Instrument of Government and in academies this is listed in the Articles of Association. It should be remembered that all governors and trustees, including the headteacher, are equal in status and have equal voting rights.

**Associate members** - Boards of maintained schools can choose to appoint individuals who are not governors but can be invited to attend meetings to share expertise and experience from outside formal governor membership. They cannot vote at full governing body meetings but can be given voting rights by the full governing body at committee level.

### **What time commitment is expected?**

Board meetings are held at least three times a year and dates are usually set a year in advance. Meetings usually last two hours and governors and trustees will be sent papers in advance for prior reading. This ensures that meetings can focus on discussion and decisions, rather than members reading papers in the limited meeting time available.

Governors and trustees must also be committed to getting to know their school or academy. This will involve visiting the setting so that they can observe what goes on, and also attendance at events where they can meet staff and parents, e.g. training days, parent consultation evenings etc.

All governors and trustees are volunteers and the time commitment expected is quite significant. Some employers may give 'reasonable time off' to employees so that they can undertake their duties. Individual governors or trustees would need to discuss this with their employer and establish whether or not the time off is with pay.

Most governors and trustees serve for a four-year term of office, although some categories are for a lesser term as decided by the governing board when drawing up the school's Instrument of Government or Articles of Association. Governors and trustees can resign at any point during their term and can request reappointment, or can be re-elected at the end of the period.

### **What support do governors and trustees receive?**

Schools and academies can choose to buy in support from the Governance Support and Development Service within City of York Council. This support includes access to a helpline during office hours, run by an experienced team who can provide advice and support on any governance matters; access to a website containing information and guidance on key issues; and a regular electronic newsletter providing up to the minute governance information. New governors and trustees will receive an induction pack and be invited to attend a 'Welcome to Governance' training session. This session introduces the three core responsibilities of governing boards, explores the types of challenges governors and trustees may face during their time in post and provides the opportunity for governors and trustees to produce a personalised action plan for the year ahead.

A comprehensive programme of face-to-face and online governor training is also available and governors and trustees will receive a copy of the training programme at the beginning of each academic year – or on appointment. Fellow governors and trustees are also an obvious source of support to new board members. Some settings provide a mentor from their governing board who can guide new members in their first few months.