

# Parentkind

Bringing together home & school

## Have a say as a parent governor

Being a parent governor at your child's school comes with a lot of responsibility, but for the right kind of parent, the rewards of seeing the school and the students flourish make it all worthwhile.

### What is a parent governor?

Parent governors are a core part of a school's Board of Governors. The role is voluntary (unpaid, though you may occasionally be able to claim back expenses for things like travel and child care), and will appeal to parents who want to make a positive impact on their child's education and school life. The outcome is indirect, since the governor role has little interaction with the pupils or with daily school life, but is much more "behind the scenes". As well as parent governors, a school's Board of Governors consists of:

- Staff governors
- Local authority governors
- Foundation governors
- Partnership governors
- Co-opted governors
- Associate members

The exact make-up of the Board of Governors depends upon individual schools, within certain parameters, and this includes a minimum requirement of two parent governors on the board at all times.

For more details on how the board is structured, see [The School Governance \(Constitution\)](#) for England. For parents in Wales and Northern Ireland, see sections below.

### What do parent governors do?

Parent governors bring their wealth of experience and knowledge, contributing to the successful running of their child's school. Being a governor is a "hands off" role – decisions made by the board influence the whole school, but governors are not responsible for, or involved in, the day-to-day running of the school. The role is a necessary part of ensuring the good functioning of school leadership. Governors set the ethos of the school and drive for continuous improvement, and they also oversee financial performance and ensure money is well-spent. Governors commission the head teacher and other school leaders to act on their behalf in putting their ideas into practice, and they ensure that the school leadership is held to account in doing so.

### What responsibility and influence do parent governors have?

Quite a lot. It is the Board of Governors' role to:

- Appoint the head teacher.
- Appoint the deputy head teacher.
- Hold the school leadership to account.
- Ensure school staff have training, support and resources to be effective.
- Maintain oversight of the school's budget spending, including pupil premium allocation.
- Decide on the aims, strategy, vision and ethos of the school.
- Determine ways to put all of the above into practice as part of the school development plan.
- Hear the later stages of staff grievances or pupil exclusion appeals.

As you can see, school governors have both a creative and managerial remit. They develop ideas and strategies for putting those ideas in to practice, but also hold leaders to account and offer them constructive feedback on their performance.

Responsibility does not rest with any one individual. Decisions are made by the board as a whole, and individual governors are not held to account for collective decisions.

Boards of Governors can also work with PTAs in building a 'whole school' community, connecting with the wider community and engaging prospective parents.

## **How big a commitment is being a parent governor?**

The term of office is usually four years, though it can be decided when parents are elected to the board, and it may extend beyond their child's time at the school if their child graduates or changes school during the four-year period. During this time, you would be expected to attend and contribute thoughts and ideas to the governing board's meetings.

The chair of governors at your child's school can tell you how regularly they meet (the minimum requirement to function effectively is three times per academic year, once per term, but some schools meet twice per term). Additionally, you will be expected to visit the school as part of your duties in order to monitor and evaluate as you gain understanding for your role, and take on training for the role through the Local Authority (LA) (in the case of state-funded schools – independent schools may have their own governance training systems in place).

You may also be invited to school events such as sports days to increase the visibility of the governing board to parents and represent your school to the community. Under current employment law, employers must allow employees to undertake their duties at school, but this may be paid or unpaid, so speak to your employer and find out what their policy is.

You may resign at any time by giving written notice to the clerk on your board of governors.

## **What skills do parent governors need?**

There is no set skillset that marks out an ideal parent governor. So long as you are over 18 years of age and have a child at the school you can express an interest in becoming a parent governor for the school. It falls to the judgement of the board that any parent wishing to act as a governor

has the relevant skills and experience to govern effectively and contribute to the success of the school. Prospective candidates should be given as much information about the responsibilities and expectations of the role before putting themselves forward for election. There's also a legal requirement for parents to be DBS checked before starting their post as a governor.

## **What's in it for parents?**

There's plenty of opportunity to learn new skills, working with others to help to develop useful policies that will benefit the education of children. The role may sound formal, but governors play a vital role in the running of the school and most people enjoy their time as a governor, as well as appreciating the sense of duty and opportunity to show loyalty to their school. You may also progress to being a chair, which brings added responsibility. The experiences of school governorship look great on any CV, and can even create career opportunities.

Not only that, but you will also get to know your child's school, especially in terms of its strengths and weaknesses. You will gain a great understanding of how the school is run, and this will have a positive knock-on effect on your child's education, academic outcomes and school life.

## **How do you become a parent governor?**

If you are interested in becoming a parent governor, speak to your school's chair of governors or express your interest through application form or introductory email. You can also register your interest on [Inspiring Governance](#) – the school governance and recruitment website.

## **How are parent governors appointed?**

Schools fill parent governor roles through elections. Parent governors are elected by other parents, who can vote for candidates. Any parent with a child at the school is eligible to apply for the position of governor, but there is no guarantee of being elected to the board.

## **What about conflicts of interest?**

Objectivity is essential to the role. Parent governors must promote the best interests of all children at the school, and have a duty to maintain good relations with and be available to the other parents. Parent governors should not use committee meetings to raise issues affecting their own child at the expense of others. They can withdraw from meetings where they are concerned that they could not be impartial, or would stand to gain by the outcome of a resolution.

It is not possible to stand as a parent governor if you are an elected member of your Local Authority (LA) or if you are employed by the school.

## **Wales**

Parent Governors at schools in Wales take on the same roles and responsibilities as their counterparts in English schools; however, see [Governors Wales](#) for more resources and information.

## **Northern Ireland**

Schools in Northern Ireland similarly have a Board of Governors deciding the direction of each school, though the make-up of the board and the amount of power they have varies depending upon the type of school.

- Controlled schools (funded and managed by the state). The Education Authority oversees management of the school by liaising directly with the Board of Governors.
- Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS). Staff and trustees of the Board of Governors are appointed by the CCMS rather than the EA.
- Grant-maintained integrated. Managed by their Board of Governors and are fairly autonomous, but with some oversight by the state to ensure an integrated education.
- Voluntary grammars. Self-governed by their Board of Governors.

### **Additional duties of the Board of Governors in Northern Ireland**

Boards of Governors have a statutory duty to draw up admissions criteria to be used to select pupils where applications exceed available places in line with the Department of Education's admissions arrangement.

The Board of Governors has the power to expel or exclude pupils attending all schools other than controlled schools, where this duty falls to the Education Authority.

See [NI Direct](#) for more details about being a parent governor at a school in Northern Ireland.

### **Key points**

- Core part of school's Board of Governors
- Unpaid
- Set the ethos of the school

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