

**Becoming a**

 **Governor at an ODST academy**

 **April 2016**

# INTRODUCTION

A great deal of good practice exists around the induction of new governors, (also referred to as directors or members) and this booklet describes some of the support available from ODST

# WELCOME TO BEING A LGB GOVERNOR

School governance has never had a higher profile than it does today; it is firmly in the spotlight of Ofsted inspections and expectations are high and rising. Whilst governors are unpaid volunteers they are expected to behave as committed professionals.

Your commitment to your school and the time and effort that you devote is important.

Being an effective governor is not easy but you will not be alone. You will not, for example, be expected to make any decisions on your own, because an individual governor does not have that power. But as part of the local governing body, or one of its sub-committees, you will be able to express your views and help the LGB make corporate decisions.

The next sections attempt to predict and answer some questions you may have, providing much needed information and suggestions about other forms of help.

**WHY DO ODST SCHOOLS HAVE GOVERNORS?**

The purpose of the local governing body of the Trust is to “conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school” by fulfilling three core functions:

* **ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction**
* **holding the Headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils**
* **overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent**

Education law, the Academies Funding Handbook, ODST’s articles of association and schemes of delegation, state what local governing bodies are required to do and the rules by which they must work. The government provides a regularly updated Handbook for School Governors <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governors-handbook--3>which provides more detail about this. In summary, local governing bodies’ key activities are to:

## Understand our school

* Pupil attainment and progress
* Pupil behaviour, attendance and safety
* Teaching quality and staff development

## Set our school’s strategic direction

* Champion our vision, values and ethos
* Set priorities for school improvement
* Consider governance structure and academy status

## Commission action

* Agree improvement targets and strategies
* Agree allocation of resources
* Agree how to monitor and review progress

## Performance manage our school leaders

* Appoint our headteachers and support their leadership
* Hold school leaders to account for progress
* Ensure financial probity and efficiency

## Check we are fit for purpose

* Clarify our role and purpose
* Review constitution and ways of working
* Make sure members have necessary skills

**WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME AS A GOVERNOR?**

The local governing body is responsible for establishing the strategic direction of the school, ensuring accountability, and ensuring financial probity

As an individual Director of the Local Governing Body you agree to the following (ODST’s code of conduct):

**Role & Responsibilities**

* We understand the purpose of the board and the role of the headteacher.
* We accept that we have no legal authority to act individually, except when the board has given us delegated authority to do so, and therefore we will only speak on behalf of the governing board when we have been specifically authorised to do so.
* We accept collective responsibility for all decisions made by the board or its delegated agents. This means that we will not speak against majority decisions outside the governing board meeting.
* We have a duty to act fairly and without prejudice, and in so far as we have responsibility for staff, we will fulfil all that is expected of a good employer.
* We will encourage open government and will act appropriately.
* We will consider carefully how our decisions may affect the community and other schools.
* We will always be mindful of our responsibility to maintain and develop the ethos and reputation of our school. Our actions within the school and the local community will reflect this.
* In making or responding to criticism or complaints affecting the school we will follow the procedures established by the governing board.
* We will actively support and challenge the headteacher.

**Commitment**

* We acknowledge that accepting office as a governor involves the commitment of significant amounts of time and energy.
* We will each involve ourselves actively in the work of the governing board, and accept our fair share of responsibilities, including service on committees or working groups.
* We will make full efforts to attend all meetings and where we cannot attend explain in advance why we are unable to.
* We will get to know the school well and respond to opportunities to involve ourselves in school activities.
* We will visit the school, with all visits to school arranged in advance with the staff and undertaken within the framework established by the governing board and agreed with the headteacher.
* We will consider seriously our individual and collective needs for training and development, and will undertake relevant training.
* We accept that in the interests of open government, our names, terms of office, roles on the governing body, category of governor and the body responsible for appointing us will be published on the school’s website.

**Relationships**

* We will strive to work as a team in which constructive working relationships are actively promoted.
* We will express views openly, courteously and respectfully in all our communications with other governors.
* We will support the chair in their role of ensuring appropriate conduct both at meetings and at all times.
* We are prepared to answer queries from other governors in relation to delegated functions and take into account any concerns expressed, and we will acknowledge the time, effort and skills that have been committed to the delegated function by those involved.
* We will seek to develop effective working relationships with the headteacher, staff and parents, the local authority and other relevant agencies and the community.

**Confidentiality**

* We will observe complete confidentiality when matters are deemed confidential or where they concern specific members of staff or pupils, both inside or outside school.
* We will exercise the greatest prudence at all times when discussions regarding school business arise outside a governing board meeting.
* We will not reveal the details of any governing board vote.

**Conflicts of interest**

* We will record any pecuniary or other business interest (including those related to people we are connected with) that we have in connection with the governing board’s business in the Register of Business Interests, and if any such conflicted matter arises in a meeting we will offer to leave the meeting for the appropriate length of time. We accept that the Register of Business Interests will be published on the school’s website.
* We will also declare any conflict of loyalty at the start of any meeting should the situation arise.
* We will act in the best interests of the school as a whole and not as a representative of any group, even if elected to the governing board.

**Breach of this code of conduct**

* If we believe this code has been breached, we will raise this issue with the chair and the chair will investigate; the governing board will only use suspension/removal as a last resort after seeking to resolve any difficulties or disputes in more constructive ways.
* Should it be the chair that we believe has breached this code, another governor, such as the vice chair will investigate.

**WHAT MAKES A GOOD GOVERNOR?**

***“The membership of the governing body should focus on skills, and the primary consideration in the appointment and election of new governors should be acquiring the skills and experience the governing body needs to be effective.”*** The Governance Handbook DfE.

The word “skills” includes attitudes, behaviours and experience. The main requirements of governors are:

* Interest in education and commitment to their school
* Tolerance and ability to work with others
* Patience: everything takes a long time
* Enthusiasm
* Willingness to learn
* Willingness to spend time getting involved in the school
* Reliability
* A strong feeling about doing things openly and democratically
* An enquiring mind – willingness to both support and challenge the school
* Basic literacy, numeracy and IT skills.

The NGA’ skills matrix and audit provides a framework of the skills LGB’s require.

In effective schools a positive relationship should exist between governors, Headteacher and staff. The basis of this relationship is communication, understanding, support and teamwork. It is a good idea for the new governor to show an interest in the things the school is proud of. Shared enthusiasm is a sound basis for partnership.

It is useful to start finding out about your governing body; initially Chair, Vice-Chair, Head and Clerk – and to identify what category of governor everyone is.

# CATEGORIES OF GOVERNOR

***“It is the structure, or constitution, of the governing body that determines how many and what type of people govern the school. Each school and academy should publish its governance structure on its website.”*** Governance Handbook DfE

Academy local governing bodies usually include members appointed by ODST (variously called members, directors or trustees).

The following list of categories will be helpful to you:

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| --- | --- |
| *Parent Governors* *Staff Governors* *Foundation Governors* *Co-opted Governors* *Community Governors* | Elected by and from amongst the parents.   All governing bodies have a place reserved for their headteacher. The headteacher may choose not to be a governor but will still retain the right to attend all governors' meetings.  Other staff governors are elected by, and from the school’s teaching and support staff.  at former CE voluntary aided, voluntary controlled and foundation schools that have converted to ODST. They are appointed by the Directors; they fall into two groups: Foundation appointed by the Diocese according to its criteria and Foundation, appointed by Directors (skills’ governors)  are appointed by Directors appointed by Directors according to appropriate skills criteria |

# SUPPORT AVAILABLE FROM YOUR SCHOOL

Below is a list of key documents. Many will and must be on the school’s website. Alternatively, they can be obtained from the clerk or direct from the school:

* Structure and organisation of the governing body (also obtainable from ODST)
* Terms of Reference for sub-committees
* Minutes of the previous two governing body meetings
* Contact List
* Vision and strategic plan
* School Improvement Plan (School Development Plan)
* Latest Ofsted report
* Latest SIAMS report
* RAISEonline and FFT (Fischer Family Trust) data
* Pupil Premium data and reports

Your local governing body should not expect you to carry on where a previous governor left off. For example, if the previous governor had an interest in finance and was on the finance committee, it should not be assumed that you will have the same interest and will fill the vacancy. It is important that you discuss your skills and interests with your colleagues before decisions are made about committee membership and specific responsibilities.

# YOUR FIRST VISIT TO THE SCHOOL

Ask your Headteacher to arrange your visit to the school. It is important for new governors to participate in the life of the school. Seeing the school in action during an initial visit is a good foundation on which to build. Guidelines for subsequent visits will be outlined in your school’s Classroom Visits Policy.

## GOVERNOR INDUCTION PROGRAMME

The DfE and ODST encourage schools to provide induction for their new governors, ideally, prior to their first meeting. If you can, arrange to meet another experienced governor or a member of ODST personnel before the meeting to talk over the agenda, the formalities, and any questions you may have.

## INDUCTION TRAINING

It is strongly advised that all new governors have an induction programme or session within the first few months of becoming a governor.

## BEYOND INDUCTION

It is important that you take time to familiarise yourself with your new role. As you grow in confidence and expertise you can start to play an effective part in the work of the local governing body.

The checklist at Annex A should help to increase your knowledge and understanding of the role in the months ahead. You could use some points from it as a prompt when you make your initial visits to school.

In conclusion, there is no denying that being a school governor is a demanding job. The rewards may sometimes seem intangible; but, if it is done well, the children and staff of our ODST schools will directly benefit.