School governors: Pre-Induction / Information

What is a governing board?

Every school has a governing board made up of various members of the community. There can be between 9 and 20 members. The governing board works closely with the Head Teacher, who is responsible for the day to day management of the school. The governing board is part of the school leadership team, responsible for strategic planning and policy development. They work as a team to make sure the school provides a good quality education for all its pupils.

Why do schools have governors?

There have been school governors for many years although more recently they have been given more responsibilities and a higher public profile. They are part of a long tradition of involving lay people in policy making, as for example in local councils, or boards of health authorities and charities and they play an important part in local democracy and public accountability.

The governing board is responsible for setting the school budget and ensuring the money is being spent appropriately to obtain the best value possible. However, accountability is wider than finances. What happens in schools affects not only children and their parents but also the whole community. It is important that the school's ethos, aims, values, priorities and practices have the support of that wider community.

How is the governing board at Greenbank made up?

How a governing board is made up varies from school to school. We have the following:

- 2 parent governors who are elected by parents in the school
- 2 members of staff: Head Teacher and 1 from the education staff elected by their colleagues.
- 1 Local Authority (LA) Governor, who are appointed by the Local Authority. The authority advertises for governors and seeks to appoint members of the community who are interested in education and committed to being fully participating school governors.
- 4 Co-opted Governors. These are appointed by the other members of the governing body from members of the Community. It is entirely up to the governing body who they appoint.

Are governors paid?

No, all governors are volunteers and there is no payment for carrying out the role. However, Greenbank operates a scheme to reimburse governors for necessary expenses.

I don't know anything about education so what could I offer?

It is important that governors come from a wide range of backgrounds. The school staff and many of the parents will have knowledge of education. Governors from other areas of work or experience bring a vital outside view, can make suggestions and ask questions which might not be thought of by people closely involved with the school. Although schools may occasionally be looking for a governor with specific outside experience, finance or personnel for example, personal qualities, such as enthusiasm, tact and the willingness to listen and to ask questions are far more important than specific knowledge or experience. Individual governors will have different beliefs, values, views and experience to contribute to the work of the whole governing board.

What do governors need to do to carry out their role?

Meetings of the full governing board are held each term. These are clerked by Edsential through a service level agreement school buy into. We hold an additional full governors' meeting each term to discuss specific Greenbank items, e.g. Ofsted, performance data, the school's website, etc.

There is also a termly unclerked meeting. This provides an opportunity for governors to receive information and training outside of the committee commitments that add value to governor understanding of how school runs and its plans for future development.

We have a number of sub-committees – finance, premises & personnel, curriculum and Head Teacher's performance management – all governors are expected to join at least one of these committees. Each committee meets once a term.

It gives a good message to the school and to Ofsted, if governors take an *active role*. This may include an invitation to one of the classes, sharing in assemblies or attending an event.

As Greenbank has a residential provision, a governor is requested to carry out half-termly inspections of the provision. We inspect on a rota system.

Governors need to be able to read the reports and papers circulated for the meetings and be prepared to ask questions about them. All new governors are strongly encouraged to attend the introductory training course for governors.

Governors complete an annual audit of their skills. The resulting report identifies areas of straight within the governing board and areas for development. Governors should expect to complete at least 2 training programmes during the year to close the areas for development and maintain a log of their training.

Governors should complete an annual Pecuniary Interest form. This details any possible conflict of interest in their role in supporting and developing school.

Governors must uphold the 7 principles of public life (The Nolan Principles) and are bound by the Governor Code of Conduct.

Are there any reasons why someone can't become a governor?

Almost anybody over 18 can serve as a governor but there are some understandable restrictions. No one can serve if they are barred from working with children or vulnerable adults, if they have severe mental illness such that they may be liable to be detained under the Mental Health Act or if they are an un-discharged bankrupt. People with certain criminal convictions are ineligible depending on the nature of the offence and sentence and how long ago the offence took place. Full details of this are available.

There are a few other restrictions which help protect the balance of interests on governing boards. For example, Local Councillors are eligible to be appointed as LA governors but not as Community governors. There is also a requirement that people who are paid to work in the school for more than 500 hours in a year will not be able to be appointed to any category other than staff governor in that school.

What are the criteria for LA (local authority) governors?

All Applicants must be at least 18 years old.

An LA Governor, like every other governor, acts as an equal member of a school's governing board. In doing so, they share in the duties and responsibilities of the governing board. Broadly, these are:

- within the legal framework to work in partnership with the Head Teacher and the LA to raise standards of education
- to monitor progress and support school improvement
- in partnership with the Head Teacher and staff to develop policies for the school that will support school improvement.

Is there a training programme?

There is a full training programme available to governors including induction training for new governors. Details are available through the Head Teacher or the Training Liaison Governor.

The Cheshire West and Chester Association of Governing Bodies holds a forum each term at which senior members of the borough give a variety of presentations. This is a good source of information for governors. There is also an annual conference for Cheshire West and Chester Governors.