Bournemouth Governor Services

Becoming a School Governor

A brief guide for those thinking about becoming a governor
Welcome from The Governor Services Team

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Thank you for your interest in the role of school governor. Becoming a governor allows you to shape the education children receive and make an important contribution to your local community.

I am sure you have lots of questions about being a school governor and we hope this brief guide will help answer some questions you may have.

Advice and Support is available for schools and governing bodies from the Local Authority. Training is also available for governors and is free to governors themselves (schools have a budget to purchase the necessary governor training) Some details are set out on page 5.

It is recommended that new governors attend the Essential Governor induction course within one year of becoming a governor.

We are always seeking to improve our recruitment information and therefore, if you could take a minute to complete the feedback form on the back page, your comments would be very helpful.

We look forward to receiving your application.

Bournemouth Governor Services

01202 456254
Email: governor.services@bournemouth.gov.uk
Who are Governors?

Governing bodies include a wide range of people with different skills. As a governor you are one of a team the aim of which is:-

- To ensure the school provides the best education for all its pupils
- To be responsible and accountable for all major decisions about the school and its future
- To set the school’s vision and strategic aims.
- To monitor and evaluate performance
- To ensure the school is accountable to those it serves

Responsibilities

Governing bodies have a wide range of powers and responsibilities. They include the following key areas:-

- Staffing
- Discipline and attendance
- Oversight of the curriculum
- Use of resources
- Control and use of the premises
- Communication with stakeholders
- Organisational changes

Effective governing bodies have been described as:
‘...taking decisions within an agreed policy framework, planning for the future, budgeting to meet priorities. In doing this and monitoring the effects, it assures the quality of education to the children in the school’.

Each governing body is made up of the following types of governors;

Parent Governors:
Elected from the parents of pupils in the school.

Staff Governors:
Elected from amongst the staff of the school, one of these places is reserved for the Headteacher.

Authority Governors:
Appointed by the Local Authority (LA).

Community or Co-opted Governors:
Co-opted by the governing body to represent the wider community.

Foundation Governors:
Appointed by the relevant church authorities named in the Instrument of Government.

Partnership Governors:

Sponsor Governors:

Additional Governors:
Appointed in special circumstances by the LA or Secretary of State.

All governors once appointed or elected, share the responsibilities and work as a team.

Individuals are part of the corporate governing body, duties are carried out as part of the team. Governors are not legally liable as individuals.

Governors are NOT responsible for the day-to-day running of the school this is the job of the headteacher and staff.
Where do I fit in?

What can I offer?
- time
- enthusiasm and commitment
- If you are a parent, your own understanding of other parents’ concerns, but you don’t need to be a parent to be a good school governor
- your local knowledge and experience; as a member of the school’s community, will be very valuable; you will have a feel for what is important to people
- your skills; if you happen to have business or organisational skills schools can find these particularly helpful, but they are not a requirement as everyone has something to offer
- Tact and flexibility

What will I get out of being a school governor?
- The knowledge that you are playing a part in improving children’s education and supporting the school’s staff
- A chance to develop new skills and to practise existing ones, such as chairing meetings, speaking in groups, asking questions, making suggestions and being involved in appointing staff
- A chance to help other members of the team, perhaps because they are new, are not used to committee work or need help in learning about the school and about school governance
- A chance to work as part of a team committed to supporting and improving children’s education using a diverse range of skills which you can both contribute to and learn from
- Training and support in order to help you fulfil your responsibilities

What makes a good school governor?
- You care about improving children’s educational attainment
- You want to contribute to the local community
- You want to work as part of a team and can value the contribution made by different people
- You are willing to attend training
- You are willing to ask questions
- You are open to ideas and willing to learn
- Commitment to playing your part

Do I need qualifications to be a school governor?
No. No one governor is expected to know it all. The strength of a governing body relies in its ability to attract and rely upon members from a wide variety of backgrounds, share out the duties amongst its members and be able to take decisions as a group. School need volunteers (whether parents or not) with experience of life. However, though not a requirement some governors may have qualifications or professional skills that a governing body might find particularly useful.
What training is available?

The Governor Training and Development Programme offers detailed training on a wide range of topics. The programme is advertised annually in a course booklet sent to every governor each year and reminders are sent out each term of the courses on offer.

The Bournemouth Governors’ Conference is a major event held in the spring term, giving governors the opportunity to listen to national speakers, attend workshop sessions and meet other governors.

Whole Governing Body Training Sessions are delivered to individual governing bodies usually at your school and can be tailored to address the specific needs of your governing body.

Courses offered include:-

- Induction for new governors
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Understanding the school curriculum
- Judging value for money
- Understanding performance data
- Committees and delegation
- Effective meetings
- Understanding school finance
- Safeguarding pupils
- School self evaluation and inspection

For more details of courses and the latest dates, please ask for a copy of the course booklet detailing the Governor training and development programme booklet.
Governors are **elected, appointed or co-opted** to become governors, depending on the type of governor.

The school or Governor Services will tell you if there are any vacancies and which type of governor the vacancy is for. They will also tell you how to put your name forward for these positions and whether there will need to be an election.

Governor Services can also tell you which schools have vacancies and which type of governor the vacancies are for.

**Steps to becoming a Governor**

1) **Gather information**
   - about being a governor
   - about schools looking for governors
   - about making your application

2) **Decide which school**
   - in which area?
   - Primary, secondary or special?

3) **Approach the school or Governor Services**
   - do they have vacancies or any coming up?
   - Is it possible to visit the school?
   - What is the school looking for in a governor?

4) **Decide whether you want to apply**
   - Do you like what you see and hear about the school?
   - Do you think you are the kind of person they are looking for?

5) **Make an application,**
   either
   - by contacting the Chair of Governors or the headteacher via the school
   - by completing the application form and returning it to Bournemouth Governor Services for Authority Governor vacancies in the first instance or we can redirect you to an appropriate school.
How governing bodies work?

A governing body:
- works closely with the headteacher
- makes decisions collectively as a team
- often delegates decision making to committees or to individuals, for example, to the headteacher
- conducts most of its business through meetings, making use of relevant papers and guidance, and advice from the headteacher

Governing bodies have a number of official positions, including the Chair, Vice-Chair and the Clerk who has an administrative and advisory role. The clerk is appointed by the governing body, and can not be a governor.

Most governing bodies have committees to which they delegate much of the work in the main areas of responsibilities – for example, staffing, finance, curriculum, premises.

Normally all governors will be members of at least one committee.

**Individual governors alone do not carry responsibilities and have no power unless the governing body delegates a specific matter to them.**

Named Governors

As well as committees, governing bodies often have named governors with specific responsibility to link with the school on certain areas such as Special Educational Needs, Literacy or Numeracy.

In Bournemouth we also ask governing bodies to nominate a ‘training liaison governor’ who liaise with Governor Services on issues of governor training and development.

Governing Body Agendas

The agenda is put together by the clerk, chair of governors and the headteacher. You can ask the clerk or the chair whenever you want to put a topic on the agenda. The chair has the final discretion to decide agenda items. The clerk will tell you how much notice you need to give when you have something for the agenda.

Some matters should not be discussed at full governing body meetings as; there are legal procedures that must be followed and which might be compromised if the governing body discusses the matter. These are usually matters relating to individual members of staff or pupils for example disciplinary issues or parental complaints. Speak to your clerk, chair of governors or headteacher if you have any doubts about whether a matter can be discussed appropriately.

Confidentiality

Governors are often aware of sensitive and confidential information, for example about staff or pupils. It is essential that this information remains confidential and is not discussed outside governing body meetings.
What rights do I have to help me do the work of a governor?

Can I claim an allowance for expenses from the school?
Governing bodies can pay their members’ expenses, if they wish and expenses are often incurred in the performance of governor duties. For example, allowances may be paid to reimburse governors for expenditure they needed to make for:
- childcare expenses
- care arrangements for an elderly or dependent relative
- support with special needs (for example audio equipment)
- support for governors whose first language is not English (for example translations); and
- telephone charges, photocopying, stationery

Governing bodies cannot pay governors for their time or for any loss of earnings whilst they are attending meetings.

Do I get time off with pay?
Employers may, if they choose, continue to pay school governors for time they take off for their duties but do not have to do so.

How will I keep up-to-date?
In addition to the training programme, information and guidance literature is sent out regularly by the LA on matters related to the responsibilities of governors.

Will I be able to get advice if I need it?
Advice is always available for governors who have questions. You can get advice either in writing, by email or over the telephone from the Governor Services Team on tel no: 01202 456254.

Can I have time off work to carry out my duties?
Under employment law, employers must give employees who are school governors reasonable time off to carry out their duties.

The employer and employee must agree on this, so it can require some careful negotiation.
What do governors actually do?

- Attend full Governing Body meetings. The minimum requirement is three a year, but in practice most governing bodies meet twice per term.
- Read papers sent to you before meetings so that you are up to date and aware of items on the agenda.
- Contribute to decisions made at meetings.
- Visit the school from time to time during the day. It is important to get to know staff and children and how the school works.
- Attend school events – sports days, open evenings, fetes and the many other activities that are part of school life.
- Take part in committees, working groups or panels for staff recruitment interviews, disciplinary hearings or to deal with complaints.
- Go on governor training. A comprehensive programme is organised by Governor Services.

How much time does it take?

Governors act as a team and, as such, the amount of time that each of them can give to the role will vary.

Some people will be able and willing to give a lot throughout their time as a governor. Others will find that the amount of time they can give increases or reduces during that period. But if you are serious about helping your school to help children, then you do need to:

- be willing to prepare for meetings: there can be a lot of papers to read;
- attend meetings: the governing body must meet at least three times per year, but in practice most governing bodies meet twice per term. You will also will be asked to serve on at least one committee. How often this meets will vary, but it is not unusual for one committee to meet twice a term;
- be able to get to meetings which, quite often, can be during the evening but which may be early or during the day. This varies from school to school;
- Participate.

If you cannot prepare for, and attend meetings regularly, you will not be able to support the school effectively.
There are 10 secondary schools in Bournemouth, mixed and single sex. Four cater for pupils up to the age of 18.

There are 26 schools for primary age children in Bournemouth. As well as schools catering for the full primary age range there are infant and junior schools with varying age ranges. Some include provision for nursery age children.

There are 2 special schools in Bournemouth, catering for pupils with special needs. Of these, one is a community school for pupils with a range of disabilities and one is a community school for pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Everyday over 21,000 children attend schools in Bournemouth

Children’s Services aim to...

- Be an 'enabler' of lifelong learning, working with partners to create opportunity and encourage wide participation
- Plan, build and invest to ensure schools function effectively and there are sufficient school places
- Provide help and advice for parents
- Provide high quality support to enable pupils to flourish at school, including children with Special Educational Needs
- Provide or commission quality services on behalf of all learners that represent the very best value
- Support and challenge schools to achieve the highest standards
- Support school governing bodies as champions of high quality education
- Provide formal and informal learning for children and young people