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This Welcome Guide for new school governors has been produced by the Leadership and Governance Team, part of Northamptonshire County Council School Improvement service.

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WELCOME TO BEING A SCHOOL GOVERNOR

You are joining a membership of nearly 5000 School Governors at more than 330 schools in Northamptonshire, governors who dedicate themselves to the important task of overseeing the provision of quality education for young people in the county. As a governor, you will be helping to ensure that those young people have the best opportunities available to them in schools.

Your commitment to your school(s) - the time and effort that you devote - is probably your greatest gift, one which will be greatly valued by fellow governors, by those who appointed or elected you and by the School Improvement service.

Being a governor may not be easy but at least 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. As part of the governing body, or one of its committees, you will be able to voice your opinions and help the group to make majority decisions.

As a newly-appointed governor you will have many questions to ask in the course of finding out what is now required of you. The next sections attempt to predict and answer some of those questions, providing much needed information and suggestions about other forms of help.

It could well be that you have been a school governor in the past, perhaps in another Education Service, or that you are already familiar with some of the contents of this pack. We have assumed that the reader has no prior knowledge of school governance but we would like to think that anyone reading this material will find something in it for them.

Please start by looking through the book so that you know what it contains but don't attempt to take it all in. You will find yourself returning to various parts as the need arises – for example, when you are sent details about your first meeting you can prepare yourself by referring to page 11. When you come across an unfamiliar education term, you can look it up in the separate glossary provided. There is no need to learn everything by heart!

As you read through the book, you will find some further reading suggestions at the foot of some pages. There are also some optional '**Suggestions**' to help you familiarise yourself with the material and to get to know what is expected of you as a school governor. You could find it useful to complete them if you have the time. Please remember, however, there is no substitute for getting to know your school.

The Chair or Link Governor in your governing body will know of the contents of this pack, and will help you to feel welcome and to get to know your fellow governors.

Good Governing!

WHY DO SCHOOLS HAVE GOVERNORS?

The short answer is "because the law says so". In England and Wales, State education is provided through the operation of a partnership between central and local government, voluntary interests (e.g. the Churches), school governing bodies, headteachers and the staff. There have been school governing bodies in some form or another for hundreds of years but it is only since the mid-1980s that their members have been drawn to such an extent from the ordinary people who make up the school community.

The law requires each school to have a governing body. The governing body is made up of people who represent many interested parties (including parents, teachers, the Education Services, the Church, the community) and its task is to oversee the running of the school (this is discussed in greater detail later).

The role of the governing body has been shaped over many years by a series of education acts, the most recent being The Education Acts of 2002 and 2003. These acts have introduced great changes, both for the way our schools work and for the way governing bodies operate.

Essentially the role of governors does not change very much. It is simply to represent the public in the running of schools, whose quality affects all of us, and to bring to that task fresh perspectives from ordinary life. The role of the governor is explored in greater depth throughout this book, especially in the section entitled "What makes a good governor?" The law also states what governing bodies are required to do and the rules by which they must work. Each Education Service translates those rules into working instructions which relate to different types of schools in its area. These instructions are called the "Instrument of Government".

Every governor receives a copy of the School Instrument when they are appointed, and details of the Guide to the Law for each type of school are available on www.governor.net.co.uk. This Guide is updated from time to time by the Department for Education.

WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF A GOVERNING BODY?

The management of a school is carried out through a partnership between the governing body, the Headteacher and the Education Service. The Headteacher and staff manage the school on a day-to-day basis within the policies made by the governing body under its strategic role.

Under various Education Acts, the governing body has particular responsibility for:

- * the **Curriculum**, particularly for the implementation of the National Curriculum for Religious Education and worship, for Special Educational Needs, for Sex Education, Literacy and Numeracy
- * the **School Development/Improvement Plan** – including recommendations from any OfSTED inspection
- * setting targets for **School Improvement**
- * **Staffing** numbers and salaries, the appointment of the Headteacher and staff, and procedures for staff grievance, discipline and dismissal
- * the setting and management of the **School Budget**
- * care and maintenance of the **premises**, especially Health and Safety matters, and the use of premises outside school hours
- * **admissions** policies – for Foundation and Voluntary Aided Schools only
- * **pupil behaviour** guidelines, and procedures for pupil exclusions
- * **informing parents**, on all matters where the law gives them the right to such information
- * the policy on **charging for school activities**

It's quite a list but an individual governor is rarely required to make decisions alone. This is usually considered to be the job of the governing body as a whole, although the governing body may delegate some of its responsibilities to committees, to individual governors or to the Headteacher. Governors, both as a body and individually, can always call upon a wide range of expert advice if they need it.

For further information, please see "A Guide to the Law for School Governors" (CDROM)

WHAT IS EXPECTED OF ME AS A GOVERNOR?

You are **required** to:

- * *attend meetings*

By law, there must be at least one meeting per term and failure to attend for any six-month period could well result in disqualification. Practice among governing bodies varies greatly – the “average” may be five or six meetings per year – and there will almost certainly be committee meetings more often on particular subjects.

You are also **expected** to:

- * *work as a member of the governing body for the best interests of the school*

This involves asking questions on a range of matters perhaps when you are visiting the school, attending an open evening or in a meeting. It also means contributing your opinions to the decisions of the governing body and accepting the majority view which may not always reflect your own opinion.

- * *represent the views of others, i.e. those who appointed or elected you*

Remember that you represent a group (parent, teacher, church, business, community and so on) which may have a range of views. You do not necessarily have to vote in accordance with their opinions, but you should listen to them and convey them to the governors, and perhaps report back to interested parties on matters which aren't confidential.

- * *show an interest in school activities*

This means the everyday work of the school as well as special events.

- * *find out as much as you can about your school*

There really is no better way of finding out about your school than by visiting during working hours. It is courteous to make an advance arrangement with the Headteacher and teachers. When asking your school for information, be sure you know why you need it – it can take somebody a great deal of time assembling the facts.

- * *know your “Guide to the Law”- what it contains and where to look up items.*

- * *support your school – be a critical friend*

Do raise matters of concern, but be sure to consult with the Headteacher first. Above all, please be constructive.

- * *be discreet about confidential matters, particularly when personalities are involved*

Governors must honour the privileged position they are in and treat confidential items with respect.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD GOVERNOR?

In her book, “Basics for School Governors”, Joan Sallis considers this question:

“The first qualification must be ordinariness. Everyone has skills – listening, peacemaking, organising, throwing ideas into the air, catching ideas and patiently working them through. A good governing body will have a mix of these skills and schools must make it clear that they are not looking for everyone to be accountants, lawyers or builders.

The main requirements are:

- * interest in education and commitment to that 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
- * a strong feeling about doing things openly and democratically

It is, indeed, a responsible job and you can't help feeling nervous.

Remember that the whole idea of governors rests on the fact that they are ordinary people mostly from the local community served by the school, bringing everyday experience to the task.

Because you probably live or work in the community and see the school as others see it, you are well placed to be a good ambassador for the school and a good messenger for the community - to explain, praise, defend, warn and guide”.

By now you have perhaps discovered that a positive relationship should exist between the governors, and headteacher and his/her 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.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I DO?

You should develop your knowledge of:

- * the responsibilities of the governing body
- * the governing body itself
- * the school

As individuals, governors may have considerable influence, but only the governing body has power because the responsibilities, which the law gives to governors, belong to them as a group. In order to be effective, the governing body must work as a team.

This means respecting the views of fellow governors: trying to help and get the best from each other; working at a problem until you reach a solution that the majority accepts. This in turn means being prepared to give and take and being loyal to those joint decisions.

Decisions made by governing bodies can have far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for a school and its pupils. Good decisions can only be made by people who know the school well.

Getting to know your school means gaining information and meeting people – information about the school's location, its history, its buildings, the way it works, its aims and policies and meeting pupils, staff and parents. Although all schools care about and want the best for their pupils, they are all different and have different ideas about educating young people. In much the same way as a ship has a destination port to reach and a route to follow, each school has its own set of aims which state what it hopes to achieve and policies that show how it will get there.

The Governors Service provides a wide range of support – advice, resources and training courses – to enable school governors to increase their knowledge and experience. The Link Governor on your governing body will be able to tell you more about these services.

Suggestion:

Find out what policies the school has, when they were written and when they are due for review. You may find policies on the curriculum, special educational needs, sex education, admissions, health and safety, behaviour, staff salaries, uniform etc. Make a list of them as below, with dates for review.

POLICY

e.g. Health and Safety

DATE WRITTEN

May 2010

REVIEW DATE

May 2011

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT MY GOVERNING BODY?

It is important to get to know your fellow governors because you will be working together as a team. In time, you should become familiar with the strengths of other governors, the skills they possess, and the opinions they hold. Likewise, they will come to respect your experience, capabilities and views. In this way, the governing body of your school will be able to operate effectively and efficiently, with everyone sharing tasks and responsibilities.

Suggestion:

Start finding out about your governing body – complete as much of the chart below as you can, noting what type or category (see next page) of governor each person is.

A fellow governor, perhaps the Link Governor, or the clerk, will be able to assist you in obtaining this information.

Name

Address/Tel No

Category Of Governor

Chair.....

Vice Chair.....

Link governor.....

SEN Governor.....

Literacy Governor.....

Numeracy Governor.....

ICT Governor:.....

Performance Management Governors:.....

.....

Review officer:.....

Name

Address/Tel No

**Category Of
Governor**

Other Governors:

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

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.....

.....

.....

Also note the name and address of the Clerk to the Governing Body

.....

.....

CATEGORIES OF GOVERNOR

As determined by the 2003 Education Act, the size of your school governing body is listed in your school's Instrument of Government. The length of service for each category of governor, if different from a standard four years, is shown in the Instrument.

Parent Governors	are elected by and from the parents
Staff Governors	are elected by and from all staff at the school
LA Governors	are appointed by Governors Service.
The Headteacher	is automatically a governor and so has a vote. The Headteacher may choose not to be a governor but retains the right to attend all governors' meetings
Foundation Governors	are at voluntary aided, voluntary controlled, and some foundation and foundation special schools. They are appointed by the body (mostly the church) named in the Instrument
Community Governors	are appointed by members of the governing body. They can bring expertise found in the local community (including the business sector).
Partnership Governors	will exist only at foundation and foundation special schools which do not have a foundation or trustees. Partnership governors must be members of the community served by the school who are committed to the good government and success of the school.
Sponsor Governors	a sponsor is a person or corporate body that is giving, or has given, financial assistance to a school, although not obliged to give such assistance by law

HOW CAN I PREPARE FOR MY FIRST MEETING?

You should receive the necessary papers well in advance of the meeting, and these will include:

The Agenda	gives the order of the business of the coming meeting
The previous minutes	are a written outline of the previous meeting, which record discussions and decisions made
The Headteacher's report	contains an account of school matters, problems, changes and the effects of decisions made by governors
Various papers	these will relate to items on the agenda

Read through your papers carefully. You might like to use different coloured pens or highlighters to mark important points, words or phrases you don't understand, and items you might ask a question about. Make notes of any ideas you may have or anything you have found out which may have a bearing. For the meeting itself, make sure you have your papers, spare paper and a pencil for making notes. Be sure to arrive on time. The seating arrangements are likely to be determined by the size and shape of the meeting room – you will need to make notes so make sure you have something to rest on if you are not sitting at tables.

Don't worry if you cannot think of any questions to ask or if you don't spot anything important. As you get to know the school and feel more at ease with your fellow governors, the paperwork will become more meaningful. All governing bodies are different so their meetings will vary – personalities, the surroundings, the numbers attending, the degree of formality – will all have a bearing on the 'atmosphere' of the meeting. Remember, as a governor, you have the right to air your views and to ask for a clarification of things that are unfamiliar to you.

Schools should have a programme of induction for new governors. If you can, arrange to meet another experienced governor before the meeting to talk over the agenda, the formalities, and any questions you may have. He/she may agree to accompany you, sit with you and show you the ropes, just as *you* probably will for new governors in the future. This will help you to feel more relaxed, especially if it's your first experience of a formal type of meeting.

Hopefully, the first item of the agenda will allow other governors to introduce themselves to you, and you to them. Tell them a little about yourself, your family, what your special areas of interest will be as a governor. You will find it gives you confidence and helps you to quickly feel part of the team.

When you attend the New Governor Training Course, provided by the Leadership and Governance Team, you will have an opportunity to look at governing body meetings in greater depth.

How can I get to know my school?

How you go about obtaining information really depends upon you. By far the best way of finding out what makes a school 'tick' is to visit it during working hours. Whether you are at work or have a home to run, it may be difficult to visit during school hours but with careful planning it should be possible to visit on a regular basis. Governors are entitled to a 'reasonable amount of time off work' in order to carry out a 'public duty' (please see "A Guide to the Law").

Schools have changed greatly in the last few years so they will be different from the memory you may have of them.

Suggestion:

Start to compile a record in the next section ("The School") by gathering as much information as you can. You could ask for some papers e.g.

- * the School Development Plan
- * the latest OfSTED inspection report
- * copies of the agenda, minutes and related papers from previous governors' meeting, especially Headteacher's reports and reports of any governors' visits
- * a copy of the school brochure, prospectus or profile
- * any information sent to new pupils and their parents
- * the staff handbook, if your school produces one
- * a calendar of school events for the coming year
- * copies of school magazines, newsletters to parents etc

THE SCHOOL

Name of school.....

Address.....

.....

Post code Telephone No

Headteacher.....

Deputy.....

Type of school.....

Age range:.....to.....

No. of pupils: boysgirls.....total.....

No. of staff: male.....female.....total.....

Size of annual intake (standard number).....

School day starts at:.....finishes at:.....

Break times:.....

Other staff & contacts: heads of department, ancillary staff, secretary, bursar, site supervisor, school nurse, adult education, youth service)
N.B. This information can be gathered over time

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.....
.....

Parent Teacher Association
Contact Tel

Education Services
(education officers for the area) Tel

Senior School Improvement
Adviser Tel

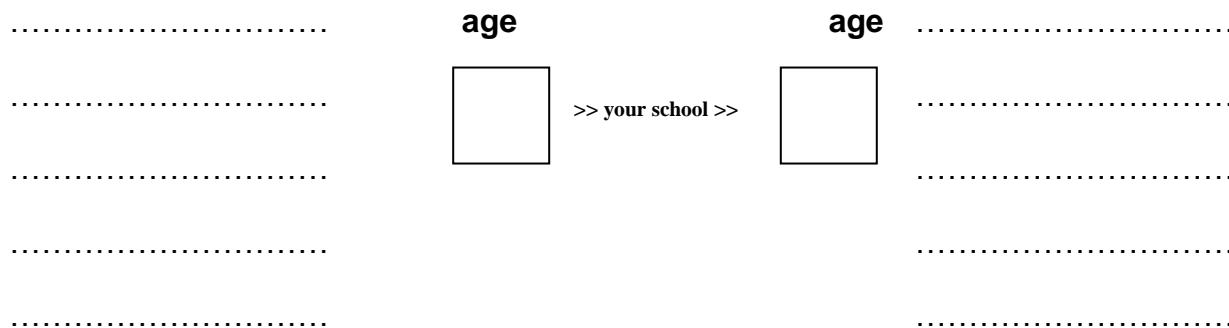
School Improvement Partner Tel

Education Welfare Officer Tel

At what age do pupils usually enter the school? At what age do they leave? Can you name some of the schools that feed into your school, and some of the schools that the children transfer to? The diagram below will help you to record these details.

local/feeder schools:

transfer to:



Does your governing body ever meet with governors of your neighbouring schools?

What should I do when I visit my school?

The First Visit

- ♦ It is important that your school visit gets off to a good start, so:
- ♦ DO make arrangements with the Headteacher
- ♦ Please DON'T demand a visit
- ♦ DO plan your visits carefully
- ♦ Please DON'T visit a school with the intention of 'inspecting' it
- ♦ DO observe and ask questions and DO praise anything that impresses you
- ♦ Please DON'T raise matters of concern without first consulting the Headteacher

You should not visit the school without the prior agreement of the Headteacher. Rather than just turn up (even if you have been invited to drop in at any time), it is polite to ask in advance whether you may visit. After all, the school is a workplace and the work must go on.

If you telephone the school, you will probably speak to the secretary who will pass on your message to the Headteacher. He or she will most likely return your call, suggesting a convenient time and day for you to come. If you are a parent with children at the school, it is a good idea to avoid their particular class(es).

Your first impressions of the school will show how other people see it. It may be a good idea to ask yourself:

- * Are the school buildings in a good state of repair, outside and inside?
- * Is the main entrance clearly marked?
- * Is the reception area bright, welcoming and interesting?
- * Can I find the way to the school office easily?
- * Are the corridors cheerful, with the work of pupils displayed proudly?

Find the time to learn about the full range of duties fulfilled by the teachers and discover ways of supporting them. Show a genuine interest in the pupils, not just the eager ones who will want to impress you with their neat books but the shy ones too. Try not to do too much or outstay your welcome. Thank the teachers you have met and at the end of the visit, thank the Head.

Your visit will not just be about the state of the paintwork. You will find out about the 'feel' or 'atmosphere' of the school and that depends very much on the people in it - the way they are treated, their attitudes, problems, successes and morale. Eat with the children at lunchtime, or have coffee with the staff at break time; visit one particular class to look at their work (some schools like to have different classes 'adopting' different governors), or spend some time with the site supervisor.

Suggestion:

Talk over the arrangements for the first visit with an experienced governor who has a good knowledge of the school at work.

As you begin to find your way around the school you will be learning how the school works, about standards and attitudes, almost without realising. People will learn about you too, will recognise you and welcome you on your next visit, learn to trust you and be able to talk openly with you. There aren't many professions where outsiders can come in as observers, so it is important to show that you are there to learn, support and not to criticise or judge.

As soon after your visit as possible, jot down some notes to remind you of what you have seen and heard. You may be asked to make a short report to the Head or the governing body as your observations as a relative outsider could prove revealing and, in any case, you will be providing an update for your fellow governors.

Further Visits

Future visits will be easier because you will already know the ropes. They should always be planned and arranged in advance with the Headteacher and teaching staff. Reasons for further visits could be to:

- ♦ get to know one particular class better
- ♦ 'shadow' or accompany a pupil on a typical day
- ♦ help carry out an annual health and safety review
- ♦ look at the reading scheme or the adequacy of science equipment

but there are sure to be 101 other good reasons for visiting!

HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT GOVERNING?

The more you become involved in the life and work of the school the more it will help you as a governor. You should:

- ♦ attend the meetings
- ♦ read all the necessary papers
- ♦ make visits to the school
- ♦ ask questions whenever you require clarification
- ♦ keep in touch with parents
- ♦ talk to other governors whenever you can
- ♦ attend a selection of governor training courses

If you would like to improve upon what you do and make sure that you keep up-to-date, here are a few suggestions:

- ♦ If you cannot visit the school regularly during the working day, try to attend as many evening/weekend events as possible and use those opportunities to talk with staff, children and parents
- ♦ You could become involved with one or more of the governing body's committees or working groups and along with fellow governors take on extra responsibilities
- ♦ Attend other development activities, training courses or conferences which are run by the Leadership and Governance Team and report back to your next meeting any ideas or information you may have gained. Ask your Link Governor for details of these events
- ♦ If you feel awkward about asking basic questions which might seem trivial to the more experienced, then contact the Governors' Helpline (**Tel. No. 01604 655087**) and speak to someone in confidence
- ♦ Read The Northamptonshire Governor and the Directors' Report to Governors distributed by the Leadership and Governance Team each term to schools requesting paper copies
- ♦ Read education articles in the newspapers and in magazines – try the school or local library for specialist publications such as the Times Educational Supplement, Child Education, Education, and Managing Schools Today
- ♦ There are governors' resources available in some libraries. Find out if there is something similar in your school