

Becoming a Governor

I wanted to write this to share my reasons as to why I became a school governor, what it's about and why I really enjoy the role, as well as to raise awareness of how much **we need you!**

If you are reading this, it's likely because you're already enjoying the rewards and challenges of being a governor or toying with the idea of becoming a governor yourself, and that's great.

There's a national shortage when it comes to school governors. A couple of years ago, the government were looking for an estimated 30,000 volunteers. One of the reasons, it seems, is to do with age. Younger candidates in particular, don't feel they have the time, qualifications or even the right number of years.

Why school governance?

Often when people find out I'm a governor, they ask me "Why?" and my first reaction is 'why not?' Obviously, everyone is different but for me, it was pretty simple. I made the decision to get into school governance once my youngest son (now 9 ¾) started school. I wanted to find a way to be more involved with the school, having three children there and I had to seek out a way to be proactively involved. Coincidentally and luckily for me, a vacancy on the school's governing body cropped up for a parent governor and I jumped at the chance to be involved. I was fortunate enough to be voted in!

Truly, at the time, I had no idea of what being a governor was all about: *helping children and schools achieve high standards of education and wellbeing*, so it was the perfect opportunity for me to learn how. It was a challenge definitely, but nonetheless, one that I relish.

So what does a school governing body do exactly?

In a nutshell, the main responsibilities of a school governing body are to:

- set the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school
- hold the Head Teacher to account
- oversee the staffing and financial performance of the school

Typically, between school visits, reading reports and meetings, you can expect to spend around 10 hours per half term on the role.

What are the benefits of being a governor?

As well as the obvious benefits schools enjoy as a result of having strong governing bodies, there are also clear benefits to you as an individual.

1. You support your local community

Through doing this role you have a real opportunity to improve the educational outcomes of tomorrow's workforce. Think of how many children's lives you will have supported and impacted on – they may even be your employees of the future!

2. It can give you a professional advantage

Being a governor will support you career-wise. It's a really cost-effective way to develop your business skills such as strategic thinking, performance management, recruitment and data analysis, and gives you lots to talk about in job applications and interviews! As well as all this, you get access to some fantastic (and free!) CPD – I have attended masterclasses led by experts in the field, workshops and networking events all as part of my governor's role!

3. It gives you a sense of wellbeing

For me, this is a really important aspect of the role. I am part of a close team working towards a shared goal to improve educational outcomes. This can be so rewarding and can give a real sense of satisfaction.

It's time to forget those urban myths

Urban myth 1: You have to be ancient to be a governor

Wrong. You can be 18 years or over. Schools are actively encouraging and recruiting governors of all ages.

Urban myth 2: You need specialist qualifications.

Wrong. You don't need any particular qualifications to become a school governor just the ability to work with people. Training, support and mentorship is always given to new governors.

Urban myth 3: I won't have time for anything else.

Wrong again. Of course, you have to be able to give enough time to fulfil your role (think along the lines of 10 days per year) but it doesn't have to take over your life.

At the end of the day, your school needs you!

The key skills that you use daily on your course if you are studying, in your place of work, (such as problem solving, data analysis, strategic thinking, time management) are highly sought after by schools. You will have an opportunity to work with other committed individuals, from a whole range of public and private sectors all joining together to directly impact school strategy – and most importantly – lead to better outcomes for children.

Some links you may find helpful:

<http://www.nga.org.uk/Be-a-Governor.aspx>

<https://www.gov.uk/become-school-college-governor>

Being a Parent Governor

Parent governors are in a unique position on a governing body. Not only do parent governors have to work in the best interests of the school, but they have to balance this with their natural desire to see the best outcomes for their own child(ren). The aim of this is to offer advice to new parent governors on their specific role and suggest ways of handling some of the trickier situations that may arise.

As a parent governor it may sometimes feel that you have to know everything about the school, but you can't talk about it; you have to be on everyone's side; if you don't do paid work, then people imagine that you have loads of spare time....and you have to be able to juggle all these expectations. As a parent, you will already be an expert juggler, but developing your role as a governor will take time. You will not be alone! There is always advice, help and support to tap into.

Parent Governor are:	Parent Governors are not:
Well placed to understand the parental viewpoint and to remind the governing body how matters being discussed affect parents	Expected to gather the views of other parents and take them to the governing body
Individuals! How you vote on any decision is up to you.	Simply expected to represent the interests of parents
In a good position to help the governing body to communicate effectively with parents	A link between parents and the Governing Body
Equal in status to all other governors	Expected to vote as instructed by other parents

What are the good bits about being a parent governor?

- You have a very privileged and responsible role
- You have the opportunity to influence the future development of the school, not only for your children, but for children for years to come
- You have the opportunity to make a difference for other parents and influence the way the school works with them
- You will be able to put existing skills to good use and learn and develop new ones

How best to fulfil your role:

- Attend governing body meetings regularly and play an active role in committees and decision-making
- Do not be afraid to ask questions; it is part of your job as a governor.
- Learn all you can about the school and about being a governor – attend lots of training and keep abreast of education news and thinking.
- Learn how the school handles concerns and complaints; if another parent approaches you with a concern, advise them to follow the schools' procedure.
- If you have a problem with the school in your capacity as a parent, do not expect special treatment because you are a governor – follow the same procedure as any parent would be advised to do.

- Always represent the school positively as you are a representative of the organisation – be especially careful about what you say on social media sites such as Facebook
- When contributing to the work of the governing body, remember you are acting in the interests of the pupils as a whole and not specifically your child
- Always observe confidentiality. You will be privy to information about the school that you would not otherwise be, some of which may be highly sensitive. Unless you are absolutely sure that information can be shared, it is better not to discuss any governing body matters with anyone who is not a governor. Breaching confidentiality is one of a small number of actions that can lead to a governor being suspended.
- Always support the decisions of the governing body. Have your say in meetings and vote in the way you wish, but then support the outcome of any votes – even if you disagree.

Where to get help, advice and support:

- From all the other governors
- From the Head Teacher (who is also a governor)
- From the clerk
- Ask for a governor mentor or 'buddy' to help you through the first few months
- Attend the induction training offered by the Local Authority – you can book a place through the clerk. You will meet other new governors and find lots of other people trying to get to grips with their role.

And finally.....

- ⊕ Don't be discouraged if at first everything seems confusing and difficult to get to grips with. Schools are awash with jargon and ways of doing things that seem odd to those without an education background, so most new governors feel somewhat daunted to begin with.
- ⊕ Don't feel you need to know everything straightaway – it can easily take a full year to begin to see how the cycle of governing body business fits together.
- ⊕ Enjoy it and keep asking questions!
- ⊕ Smile and be proud of yourself. You are making a difference to the lives of all the children who attend Hagley Primary School.