



# Castle Newnham School

TRADITIONAL VALUES, BRIGHT FUTURES, ONE JOURNEY

## The Role of the Parent Governor

All governing bodies have to have parent governors.

Anyone who has parental responsibility for a pupil on the school roll at the time of election can stand for election and can vote in the election. A parent who works for the school for 500 hours or more per year or a parent who is an elected member of the local authority (County Councillor) is not eligible to stand for election but they are permitted to nominate and vote. If insufficient parents stand for election the governing body can appoint parents to the governing body. The term of office for a parent governor is specified in the school's Instrument of Government or Articles of Association for an academy or free school. In most schools the term is 4 years. A governor can stand down at any time.

The local authority has delegated the election process to the Head teacher of the school and provides guidance on election procedures.

### Why become a parent governor?

Parents who have a child at the school and who take an active interest in the education of **all children** at the school should consider becoming a parent governor. They should not take on this role because they have a particular concern about the education of an individual child.

Parents may have a useful skill such as an expertise in finance that can be useful to the governing body. It is useful for parents to talk to other parent governors to find out what they think about the role and what is really involved before deciding if the role is one which they would like to take on. *What have they found challenging? What have they found rewarding?*

### What will parent governors have to do?

- take an active interest in education
- give time to find out about your school
- give time to learn about the role by attending induction training
- attend meetings throughout the year (usually in the evening but depends on each individual school)
- abide by the Code of Conduct and confidentiality
- undergo the pre-appointment checks by reading and signing a Declaration of Eligibility form and completing a register of pecuniary interest.

### What skills and experiences does a parent governor need?

Being a school governor is a varied and challenging job. No one governor has all these skills and experiences, and many find that being a governor is a way of gaining some of these experiences, which can be highly transferable into professional and personal lives.



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## **Understanding and/or experience of governance**

- Experience of being a board member in another sector or a governor/trustee in another school
- Experience of chairing a board/ governing body or committee
- Experience of professional leadership

## **Vision and strategic planning**

- Understanding and experience of strategic planning
- Ability to analyse and review complex issues objectively
- Problem solving skills
- Ability to propose and consider innovative solutions
- Change management (e.g. overseeing a merger or an organisational restructuring, changing careers)
- Understanding of current education policy

## **Holding the head to account**

- Communication skills, including being able to discuss sensitive issues tactfully
- Ability to analyse data
- Ability to question and challenge
- Experience of project management
- Performance management/appraisal of someone else
- Experience of being performance managed/appraised yourself

## **Financial oversight**

- Financial planning/management (e.g. as part of your job)
- Experience of procurement/purchasing
- Experience of premises and facilities management

## **Knowing your school and community**

- Links with the community
- Links with local businesses
- Knowledge of the local/regional economy
- Working or volunteering with young people (e.g. teaching/social work/youth work/sports coaching/health services for young people)
- Understanding of special educational needs

## **The Strategic Role**

The role of a parent governor is essentially the same as that of a governor from any other category. **Some** of the ways in which governors work together strategically:

- monitoring the schools' performance and working to raise standards and promote pupil welfare
- ensuring that the school is improving the achievement and attainment of all children
- making sure that special needs are properly catered for
- dealing with disciplinary issues of pupils and staff
- appointing the Head teacher
- monitoring work-life balance of the staff and Head teacher
- setting the budget



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- helping to formulate policies
- accountability to parents by ensuring they have the information they are legally entitled to
- dealing with problems and agreeing solutions
- determining curriculum policy
- ensuring the school has sound self-evaluation processes in place

## **Collective Responsibility**

All governors have equal status. They act collectively to support the school strategically. They participate in and contribute in shared decisions. Once decisions have been made even if a governor does not personally agree with these they must act collectively to support these decisions in a united way.

## **Support and Challenge**

Governors support the school but are also prepared to question why decisions have been made and request information about the school to help them in their monitoring role.

## **The Head teacher's Operational Role**

Parent governors and other categories of governors may become involved in other aspects of school life. They may visit the school to help in various capacities such as hearing children read. What governors must not do is get involved with operational decisions. The Head teacher is responsible for the day-to-day running of the school.

Sometimes it can be difficult to decide where the strategic role ends and the operational one begins. There is a wealth of information available to governors to help them understand their role. Governors should attend Induction training to help them understand their role.

## **Diplomacy and Confidentiality**

The role requires diplomacy, adherence to a Code of Conduct and particularly confidentiality.

The role can be a difficult one at times. A parent may have to wear two hats. One when raising issues about their own children as a parent and not a governor, with the class teacher or Head teacher and the other as a parent governor raising issues at governing body meetings that represent a parent perspective.

## **The Playground**

Being a parent governor and being in contact with other parents maybe in the playground before and after school can mean that a parent governor has to be particularly careful regarding issues of confidentiality and professionalism. It is important to keep the role of governor separate from personal feelings when given information about individuals. Similarly, a parent governor may be involved in discussions of a confidential nature during the course of a governing body meeting and these discussions may concern a particular individual. Names would not normally be disclosed at meetings but inevitably at some time a parent governor may become aware about issues surrounding an individual child or member of staff. Confidentiality is of the utmost importance in these circumstances.



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A parent governor may be involved in a disciplinary case and would have to declare an interest to other members of the governing body if they had had contact with a child or teacher involved with the case. Parent governors need to be familiar with the school's complaints procedure.

## **Communicating with Parents and Representing Parents**

A parent governor has a duty to communicate concerns and feelings expressed by parents to other members of the governing body. However, a parent governor is not a delegate who attends meetings with instructions on how to vote on any particular issue. A parent governor is a representative parent and should vote on issues at meetings in the best interests of the school and according to his/her own conscience.

If a particular issue is raised and brought to the attention of a parent governor, this should be referred to the whole governing body to discuss and decide collectively how to act. A parent governor takes account of what parents are thinking and then makes a decision about what he/she feels is in the best interests of the school.

Communication between governors, parents, pupils and teachers is very important. Some of the ways for this to happen are:

- photographs of all governors may be placed in a prominent place in the school
- newsletters may be sent regularly to parents
- an annual parents' meeting (no longer a statutory requirement)
- attending School Council meetings
- meeting parents at school events
- meeting teachers and pupils on school visits

## **Induction and Support**

One of the most important ways to ensure that governors are clear about their role is for them to receive good, sound induction as soon as possible following their appointment. This should include general induction to the role by attending local authority induction training, and in-school induction to their own governing body from the Head teacher, the chair of governors and a mentor governor.

Schools subscribing to the Bedford Borough training package have free access to Induction training for their governors.

It is for individual governing bodies to decide whether to reimburse governors for expenses incurred in the course of carrying out their role and some schools have a policy in place for this.