

Parent Governor Guidance

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Being a Parent Governor

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

As a parent governor it will sometimes feel that you have to know everything about the academy but can't talk about it. Developing your role as a governor will take time.

Parent governors are:

- well placed to understand parents' views and to remind the academy committee how matters being discussed affect parents;
- individuals! How you vote on any decision is up to you;
- in a good position to help the academy committee to communicate effectively with parents;
- equal in status to all other governors.

Parent governors are not:

- expected to gather the views of other parents and take them to the academy committee;
- simply expected to represent the interests of parents;
- a link between parents and the academy committee;
- 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 make a difference, not only for your children, but for children in years to come.
- ◆ You have the opportunity to make a difference for other parents, and to influence the way in which the academy works with them.
- ◆ You will learn a lot and develop new skills.

How to fulfil your role

- ◆ Attend and play an active role in decision-making.
- ◆ Learn all you can about the academy.
- ◆ Consider how the academy committee communicates with parents? Could you help them to improve links?
- ◆ How accessible is the academy – how easy is it for parents to go into the academy to discuss things with the Principal or teachers? Could you give feedback to help the academy to be more open and welcoming?
- ◆ How accessible are the governors – do parents ever get the opportunity to meet with governors; do they know how to get in touch with the chair of governors if they need to? Could you encourage the academy committee to be more visible?
- ◆ Learn how the academy handles complaints and read the complaints policy. If another parent approaches you with a complaint, advise them to speak to the Principal.
- ◆ Be approachable to other parents, but make sure you are clear about your role.
- ◆ Always represent the academy positively.
- ◆ As a governor you are one of a group and must never act alone.
- ◆ Always support the decisions of the full academy committee. Have your say on decisions in meetings and vote in the way you wish; but then support the outcomes of votes – even if you disagree with them.
- ◆ Always observe confidentiality. You will get to know a lot of highly sensitive and confidential information – don't discuss it with anyone who is not a governor. Remember, a governor can be suspended for serious breaches of confidentiality.

How you can help individual parents

From time to time you may be approached by other parents asking for help or wanting to make a complaint about something the academy is or isn't doing.

- ◆ Make it clear you can't act for the academy committee. Refer parents to the academy's complaints policy to follow the agreed procedure.
- ◆ Don't raise expectations that the academy will "put it right" – there may be underlying issues or background that you don't know about.
- ◆ Keep an open mind – there are at least two sides to every story!
- ◆ You may need to explain why the academy committee has made a decision in a certain way, so be prepared.

What to do if you experience a conflict between being a parent and being a governor

This can happen – especially if you think the academy committee is making decisions which you feel will adversely affect your child(ren).

- ◆ If a difficulty arises, take a step back and think things through as objectively as you can.

- ◆ Raise your concerns in meetings ensuring that your comments are considering how any decisions will affect all children. If you are concerned, talk to the Principal or to the Chair of Governors.
- ◆ Make sure you don't break confidentiality when discussing your concerns outside academy committee meetings.

Where to get help, advice and support

- ◆ From other governors.
- ◆ From the Principal.
- ◆ From the Chair of Governors.
- ◆ From the Governance Professional to the academy committee.
- ◆ Ask for a governor mentor or "buddy" to help you through the first few months.

And finally.....

- ◆ Don't be discouraged if at first everything seems confusing and difficult to get to grips with. Most new governors feel this way. Schools have a bad habit of using acronyms for just about everything and whilst we try not to do this, if there is anything that you don't understand please either ask at the meeting, or contact your governance professional after the meeting who will be able to answer your question or will find out for you.
- ◆ Don't feel you have to know everything straight away.....it can take a full year to begin to see how the cycle of academy committee business fits together.