

INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE GOVERNORS

Governing Bodies of Schools

All schools have a governing body whose job it is to work with the headteacher, the local education authority and the Diocese for church schools, to ensure that the pupils receive the best possible education at that establishment.

Governing bodies vary in size from 10 - 21 or more depending on the number of pupils in the school and the type of school, but they all have the same requirement - to work together with the headteacher in agreeing the aims and conduct of the school, ensuring that the pupils have a full entitlement to the agreed curriculum and managing the school within its allocated budget.

There are regulations within which the governing body must work. These are laid down by central government (Education Acts and Regulations) and the local authority (Instruments of Government and Schemes of Financial Management).

Responsibilities of school governors

Governors are appointed and elected to provide:

- strong links between the school and the community it serves;
- a wide experience of the outside world;
- an independent view;
- a visible form of accountability for the headteacher and staff of the school;
- a team focusing on long term development and improvement;
- accountability to the community for the use of resources and the standards of teaching and learning in the school;
- support for the headteacher and staff.

Governing bodies are the strategic planners of schools

The governing body has a range of important responsibilities. In order to fulfil their role, the governing body

- employs others to carry out the work;
- has an operational manager (the headteacher) who is responsible for the day to day management of the school;
- agrees policies and practice which allows the headteacher the necessary tools to carry out his/her responsibilities;
- agrees principles and targets for improvement;
- acts as the critical friend of the school and headteacher;

- receives and discusses reports on the resulting practice and conduct of the school;
- reviews its own working practices.

Decisions of the governing body are made in formal meetings, either with the full governing body, or in committees if their terms of reference allow.

All governing bodies have committees which

- carry out tasks specifically given to them by the governing body
- aid the work of the governing body
- report back to the governing body

The number of committees depends on the governing body and its needs. Most committees are made up of at least three governors and you should expect to be asked to join at least one committee.

All governors, once appointed, 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.

Advice, support and training are available to all governing bodies from the local authority and many other sources.

Qualifications needed to become a governor

There are no formal qualifications required to become a school governor however all governors need to be able to offer the following skills and qualities

- time (see Governors' work-load below)
- commitment
- a willingness to learn
- a listening ear
- the ability to assimilate information, make judgements and take decisions
- flexibility
- tact and discretion
- ability to work as part of a team

It is important that governors come from a wide range of backgrounds. The school staff and many of the parents will have a knowledge of education. Governors from other areas of work or experience bring a vital outside view and can make suggestions and ask questions which might not be thought of by people closely involved with the school. Although schools may occasionally be looking for a governor with specific outside

experience, finance or personnel for example, personal qualities, such as enthusiasm, tact and the willingness to listen and to ask questions are far more important than specific knowledge or experience. Individual governors will have different beliefs, values, views and experience to contribute to the work of the whole governing body.

Almost anybody over 18 can serve as a governor but there are some understandable restrictions. No one can serve if they are barred from working with children or vulnerable adults, if they have severe mental illness such that they may be liable to be detained under the mental health act or if they are an un-discharged bankrupt. People with certain criminal convictions are ineligible depending on the nature of the offence and sentence and how long ago the offence took place.

You will be asked to sign a declaration stating that they are not disqualified. In addition all governors have to sign a declaration of interests at the beginning of each school year

There are a few other restrictions which help protect the balance of interests on governing bodies. For example Local Councillors are eligible to be appointed as LEA governors but not as Community governors. There is also a requirement that people who are paid to work in the school for more than 500 hours in a year will not be able to be appointed to any category other than staff governor in that school.

Time off from your work

As a school governor, your employer should give you “reasonable time off” to carry out your duties. However, what “reasonable time is off” should be agreed between you and your employer. This may or may not be with pay.

Training

The local authority offers a wide programme of training and support for governors. Each governing body is encouraged to have a member who co-ordinates the training. The clerk will regularly distribute information about new courses to all governors, or up to date information can be found on the Cheshire website:

Principles of Working as a Governor and as a Governing

Body Governors, once appointed, are holders of public office, and should be prepared to work to the same principles as any paid public official. This is true both as an individual and as a whole governing body.

Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligations to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take; they should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands this.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interest relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

(The Seven Principles of Public Life from the *Second Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life* - The Nolan Committee CM3270 - 1 May 1996)

Membership of the governing body at St Mary of the Angles Catholic Primary School

All governors are generally appointed or elected for a four year term. There is no restriction on the number of times a governor may re-stand for appointment or election.

St Mary of the Angles governors' instrument of government became effective on 1 September 2004. Under this constitution, the governing body shall consist of 14 governors, of which there will be:

- eight foundation governors (including 4 foundation governors eligible to be parent governors)
- one parent governor (elected)
- four staff governors (elected)
- one LEA governor

This formation ensures that all school stakeholders have a representative on the governing body. By maintaining a majority on the governing body, the Foundation Governors, appointed by The Bishop of Shrewsbury (or any other person exercising

Ordinary jurisdiction on his behalf) ensures that the school maintains its distinctive Catholic ethos and tradition, adding a further dimension to its central aim of providing high quality education.

Governing body meetings

The **Full Governing Body** usually meets at least three times a year –once each in the autumn, spring and summer terms. However additional meetings may be called if considered necessary. Each meeting will last between 1½ and 2 hours.

When the governing body meets together, it considers an agenda. The agenda will have been circulated to all members of the governing body at least seven days before the meeting. It is the responsibility of individual governors to make sure that they read the agenda and any supporting papers before the meeting.

For most governing bodies the main part of governors' work happens between the governing body meetings through committees.

There are two main committees, **Finance & Personnel, pupil achievement and premises**. Other committees are established as and when required. Each committee has a minimum of three governors and the group will deal with the specific responsibilities delegated to them by the full governing body. These 'responsibilities' are commonly known as their terms of reference. Members of these groups meet at least three times each year and report back to the full governing body at their termly meeting. All governors are asked to join at least one committee.

Meeting dates for the full governing body and the committees are generally set at the first meeting of each academic year. Minutes for these meetings are taken by the Clerk to the governors. The minutes of Full Governing body meetings are considered public documents and are written to reflect the activity during the meeting, the topics discussed and the decisions taken.

Governors' work-load

Governors should expect to spend at least 20 hours a term attending meetings, reading papers, visiting school, attending training courses and writing reports, however many of the governors of St Mary of the Angels find that the job takes up much less of their time than this.

All governors are expected to:

- attend the regular and special meetings of the full governing body;
- attend the regular and special meetings of at least one of the committees;
- work as a member of the governing body (not as an individual) in the best interests of the school;
- show an interest in school activities;
- become well-informed about education in general and about their school in particular;
- become familiar with the rules of school governance;

- attend necessary training courses;

Individual governors will usually be involved in some of the following activities, usually through working groups or committees:

- staff appointments
- the financial management of the school
- pupil & staff discipline
- the curriculum & policies
- the training of governors

Vacancies

Vacancies for Foundation governors are dealt with by the Parish Priest on behalf of the Diocese. Vacancies for Staff governors are announced to all staff by the headteacher. Vacancies for Parent governors are announced to parents via a letter from the clerk, which is sent home with each child. Vacancies for LA governors are dealt with by the local authority.

Getting to know your school

When you become a governor you are a representative not a delegate. For instance, if appointed as a Local Authority governor, or elected as a parent governor, this means that you cannot be instructed by the Local Authority or parents to take a particular view.

Most new governors will need some time to get to grips with their role and nobody will expect you to know about all the issues that come up. You should expect to be able to ask questions, and get answers, from other governors and from the headteacher.

A valuable contribution

School governors have an important part to play in maintaining and developing our children's education. There is a heavier workload on governors now than there used to be, but equally, the importance of the governors' role has gained national recognition.

When you are appointed as a school governor you will be asked to provide personal information that includes your home address, contact numbers, and ethnicity data. All of the information that you provide will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Your appointment will be subject to satisfactory clearance in accordance with the procedures current at the time of your appointment for safeguarding children.

If you want to know more about becoming a school governor please contact the school.

Further information:

If you want to know more about vacancies at our school or becoming a school governor please do not hesitate to contact the school.

St Mary of the Angels Catholic Primary School,
Rossall Grove, Little Sutton,
Ellesmere Port, Cheshire,
CH66 1NN

Tel 0151 338 2430

Fax 0151 348 1340

head@stmaryoftheangels.cheshire.sch.uk or
admin@stmaryoftheangels.cheshire.sch.uk

www.stmaryoftheangels.co.uk

For further information, please see the following websites:

www.Cheshire.gov.uk/governors

www.dcsf.gov.uk

www.nga.org.uk

www.governors.uk.com

www.ncsl.org.uk

www.governornet.co.uk