

The General Role of a Local Governor

Main Purpose

Working through three main functions, the Local Governing Body (LGB) provides challenge and support where appropriate, according to the level of authority delegated by the Trustees to the LGBs.

All local governors execute three main functions:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.

Contribute to the discussions at LGB meetings which determine:

- the vision and ethos of the school,
- clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school,
- that all children, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum,
- the school's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation,
- the school's staffing structure.

2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff, by:

- agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan,
- considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of school performance,
- asking challenging questions of school leaders,
- ensuring senior leaders have arranged for the required audits to be carried out and receiving the results of those audits,
- ensuring senior leaders have developed procedures and the school is operating effectively according to trust/school policies,
- acting as a link governor on a specific issue, making relevant enquiries of the relevant staff, and reporting to the LGB on the progress on the relevant school priority,
- listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders: pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community, including local employers.

3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Ensure that, within the approved budget and authority delegated by the trustees, the school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including the necessary expertise on business management, external advice where necessary, effective appraisal and CPD (Continuing Professional Development), and suitable premises and that the way in which those resources are used has impact.

There is a **further role**, which is not included in governance documentation to the same level of formality as the above three functions, although it is an important aspect of governance; this is related to ensuring voices of stakeholders are heard. This is executed operationally by each school's SLT, and the LGB must receive, consider, discuss said views on the school. This may result in action being taken by the SLT, or indeed by the LGB and/or trustees, in response to the findings of this stakeholder voice process.

Expectations and ethos of effective governance

Knowing the school, its context, strengths and areas for development (initial and ongoing)

In addition to reading these generic governance documents, a new governor's role is to get to know the school.

Reading: scrutinise key documents in order to get to know the school – the strategy, the school development plan, the most recent set of papers for the LGB and link governor group.

Visiting: during school hours by agreement with the headteacher, to gain a better understanding of the atmosphere, culture and ethos of the school. This should involve speaking to students, staff and the headteacher gaining a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Visits should be recorded formally.

The LGB needs to know the strengths and weaknesses of its school, and this is intended as a tool (amongst many) to guide new local governors in understanding the context and challenges of the school.

The LGB must have access to objective, high quality, and timely data if it is to ensure and embed robust accountability and know the questions that need to be asked of the executive leaders.

Data can cover a range of information and it is essential that every LGB has at least one person with the skills to understand and interpret the full detail of the educational performance and the financial data available.

Even those who are familiar with the school as staff or parents will find school visits important for developing their knowledge of the school from a governance perspective. It also has less obvious benefits, such as helping to build positive relationships with staff and demonstrating commitment to the school.

An LGB will want to solicit the views of parents to inform its strategic planning and give parents the opportunity to help shape their child's education, as well as being reflective about school performance and its own effectiveness.

Knowing your pupils is about listening to the views of pupils and trying to understand their point of view. It will allow you to assess the impact of all those policies, projects and procedures that aim to improve school life.

Schools are an important part of the local community. A school's reputation is influenced by its standing within the community and local governors and trustees should seek opportunities to raise the school's profile and celebrate its successes.

Challenging and supporting

The main forum for a governor's work is through the LGB meetings and as a member of a link governor group. Local governors are required to commit to attending:-

- LGB meetings (4 per year, 2 of which are in the Autumn Term)
- Link group meetings (3 per year), reading all the papers before the meeting. When required, you may be asked to serve on panels of local governors either to:
 - hear the second stage of staff grievances and disciplinary matters,
 - hear representations about pupil exclusions.
 - act as an appeal body against a decision made by the SLT.
- In addition, relevant induction training and relevant training

Act within professional boundaries.

- Read and observe the LGB's Code of Conduct adopting the Nolan Principles of public life.
- Work to the guidance of role descriptors for link governors

- Complete a Declaration of Pecuniary and Personal interests which discloses any possible conflict of interests (thereby enabling absence from voting/discussions/meeting at relevant points)

The role of a local governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role. A local governor does NOT:

- Write school procedures or school/trust policies.
- Undertake audits, even if the local governor has the relevant professional experience.
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – rather scrutinise the formal? reports from the headteacher on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Do the job of the school staff; if there is not enough capacity within the paid staff team to carry out the necessary tasks, the LGB needs to support the headteacher in rectifying this.

Depending on the content of discussions, as well as the context of an individual governor, it can be tempting to discuss operational matters. The chair will usually steer the conversation away from this as required, unless there is an operational challenge facing the Headteacher and SLT, for which they seek advice. Even in those circumstances, local governors are expected initially to ask the right questions rather than provide the answers. Sometimes working groups are put together in order to address particular issues (which tend to be task-and-finish groups).