

From the nga (National Governors' Association):

Governance

The role of the governing body

The governing body is the school's accountable body. It is responsible for the conduct of the school and for promoting high standards. The governing body aims to ensure that children are attending a successful school which provides them with a good education and supports their well-being. Over the past decade the responsibilities of governing bodies have grown; and the 'Every Child Matters' agenda has meant that schools are now accountable for children's health and well-being in the community and for a wide range of extended services provision out of school hours.

The governing body:

- Sets the strategic direction of the school by:
 - Setting the values, aims and objectives for the school
 - Agreeing the policy framework for achieving those aims and objectives
 - Setting statutory targets
 - Agreeing the school improvement strategy which includes approving the budget and agreeing the staffing structure
- Challenges and supports the school by monitoring, reviewing and evaluating:
 - The implementation and effectiveness of the policy framework
 - Progress towards targets
 - The implementation and effectiveness of the school improvement strategy
 - The budget and the staffing structure
- Ensures accountability by:
 - signing off the Self Evaluation Form
 - responding to School Improvement Partner and Ofsted reports when necessary
 - holding the headteacher to account for the performance of the school
 - ensuring parents and pupils are involved, consulted and informed as appropriate
 - making available information to the community
- Appoints and performance manages the headteacher who will deliver the aims (through the day to day management of the school, implementation of the agreed policy framework and school improvement strategy, and delivery of the curriculum) and report appropriately to the governing body.

For governing bodies to carry out their role effectively, governors must be:

- Prepared and equipped to take their responsibilities seriously;
- Acknowledged as the accountable body by the lead professionals;
- Supported by the appropriate authorities in that task; and
- Willing and able to monitor and review their own performance.

The governing body's most important strategic responsibility is to set the aims and objectives of the school, and a key element of this is to support and challenge the school's head teacher, and when necessary to appoint a new head teacher in line with those aims and as

judged appropriate to the school's needs. It is also the responsibility of the governing body to performance manage the head, assisted by the School Improvement Partner.

The NGA together with the two main headteacher's unions, the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) published a joint document *What governing bodies should expect from school leaders and what school leaders should expect from governing bodies*. This document for the first time clearly set out what is expected for a governing body to be effective. (Also in 'Useful documents' on the GGA website).

Other key responsibilities that flow from the legal framework that governors work within include oversight of the school's financial structures and responsibility for the school buildings. Most governing bodies are assisted in these responsibilities by their local authority and/or diocese.

Governing bodies have responsibility for ensuring that the school follows the objectives of Every Child Matters, which means that the school should strive for the best for each of its pupils, irrespective of disability, educational needs, race, nationality, ethnic or national origin, gender, religion or sexual orientation. Governing bodies are also responsible for promoting community cohesion. Both these duties are discharged within the legal framework for equality. The NGA believes that governing bodies as a whole and all individual governors should be committed to preventing discrimination – whether directed at children or adults – which it is within their control to prevent or challenge.

Regulations stipulate that the governors' role is largely strategic and the headteacher is responsibility for the operational day to day management of the school. The distinction between governance and management needs to be clearly understood by all parties to ensure an effective working partnership.

Although the governors' role is largely strategic, there are elements of the operational, for example, they have responsibility for the performance management of the head.

It is the NGA's view that an effective governing body ensures that it:

- carries out a skills audit and ensures that its governors receive appropriate training
- employs a skilled clerk who is able to manage the business of the governing body and advise the governing body as appropriate.
- ensures that it has access to the School Improvement Partner and his/her reports
- reviews its own performance and takes action when required.
- accepts the need for inspection and welcomes Ofsted.
- Joins the National Governors' Association to ensure that it receives up to date advice and guidance and has access to the views and comments of fellow governors.

The NGA strongly believes that if governors are going to carry out these serious and demanding responsibilities effectively then they need to be trained. In keeping with other voluntary roles that carry important statutory responsibilities, school governance should properly be perceived as a professional undertaking. Therefore the NGA believes that the government should commit to ensuring the governors are equipped to operate effectively from the outset by making induction training mandatory for all new governors.

The NGA also believes that the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services should be tasked with ensuring that current and aspiring head teachers understand the rationale of governance and accountability.

The role of the Chair of the governing body is a crucial one and the NGA supports the proposal in the *Ministerial Review on Governance* (April 2010) that there should be an

expectation that Chairs should undergo specific training. Although there is no legal constraint on the length of time a Chair of governors can serve, the NGA also believes that an element of regular reappraisal and renewal is beneficial to all schools, and that all Chairs should normally expect to step down after a maximum of six years in post.

The NGA does not believe it would currently be helpful to offer payment to some or all school governors, but supports further strengthening of arrangements to ensure proper payment of expenses and time off with pay agreed with all employers to support governors in their valuable work.