

Becoming a School Governor

April 2016

Education and Skills

BECOMING A SCHOOL GOVERNOR

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INTRODUCTION

The London Borough of Barnet is the second largest of the London Boroughs by population with an ethnically diverse population estimated (in mid- 2014) as 374,915 and is the fourth largest by geographical size covering 86.74 sq km (33 sq miles).

Education continues to be one of the council's highest priorities and we are proud of the achievements of all our schools and will continue to work in partnership with them to improve standards.

Currently (as of January 2016) the borough has 118 schools: 89 primary schools, 22 secondary schools, 3 all-through schools and 4 special schools. There are four nursery schools for children aged 3 to 5 years, plus nursery places attached to primary schools. Out of the four special schools, two are for nursery/primary aged children (2 to 11 years) and two are for secondary aged children and young people (11 to 19 years).

Different types of schools

Community schools are schools owned and maintained by Barnet Council. The council has overall responsibility for the community schools' admissions and the council arranges appeals for places at these schools.

Foundation schools are funded by the council, but the governing Boards of individual schools own the buildings, are responsible for setting the admissions criteria and handling the process including the arrangement of appeals.

Voluntary aided schools are schools funded by the council but 'voluntary Boards' (usually religious) own the buildings, and the governors of the schools are responsible for setting the admissions criteria, handling the process and arranging appeals.

Free schools are all-ability state-funded schools set up in response to what local people say they want and need, in order to improve education for children in their community.

Academies are independent schools, but no fees are charged to parents and they are required to participate in co-ordinated admission arrangements. The governing board is responsible for setting the admission criteria and for arranging appeals.

All-through schools comprise both primary and secondary education phases, where children are educated from age 3 or 4 through to age 18. Barnet has one all-through voluntary aided school and the primary phase of two all-through academies opened in September 2015.

Each school is governed by a governing board made up of professionals and lay-people who give freely of their time and energy, committing their talents to the service of their schools.

Can you answer 'yes' to the following questions? If so, then you may well have what it takes to be a school governor!

- Do you believe schools should give children the best possible education?
- Do you want to put something back into your local community?
- Are you interested in people?
- Do you have time to get to know your school, to go to meetings and read papers?
- Are you comfortable asking questions?
- Are you open to new ideas and ready to learn?

WHAT DOES A GOVERNING BOARD DO?

Governing boards are the strategic decision makers and vision setters in every school and academy. They play a vital role in ensuring the best possible education for every child by creating robust accountability for school leaders. Crucially, that means using and being familiar with objective data on the performance of pupils, teachers and finances to ask the right questions and ensure resources are allocated to school priorities.

All boards, whether in the maintained or academy sector and no matter how many schools they are responsible for, have three core functions:

- 1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;**
- 2. Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and the performance management of staff; and**
- 3. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.**

The core features of effective governance also apply at any scale and in any context, and are common to good governance practice in the charity and corporate sectors. They include the importance of the board having:

- The right people with the necessary skills, time and commitment, and sufficient diversity of perspectives to ensure internal challenge, all actively contributing in line with clearly defined roles and responsibilities under an effective chair and an explicit code of conduct, and with active succession planning;
- Clear governance structures with tightly defined remits, particularly in relation to functions delegated to committees or other Boards;
- Clear separation between the strategic and operational in terms of the role of the board and its school leaders;

- A positive relationship between the board and its school leaders enabling robust constructive challenge on the basis of a good understanding of objective data particularly on pupil progress, staff performance and finances;
- The support and advice of an independent and professional clerk and, in the case of academies, company secretary;
- Robust processes for financial and business planning and oversight and effective controls for compliance, propriety and value for money; and
- Processes for regular self-evaluation, review and improvement including; skills audits, training and development plans, and independent external reviews as necessary.

Being a governor involves more than just an interest

Governors make up the biggest volunteer board numbering some 370,000 in England and their time commitment in fulfilling their role should not go unrecognised. The time a governor devotes can vary widely, depending on how involved s/he becomes and what needs doing. The governing board usually meets at least once a term. A governor will probably also sit on one or two committees dealing with:

- Finance
- Staffing
- Curriculum
- Premises

Being a governor can be rewarding

Being a member of a Governing board provides a chance to:

- make a difference to how well the school runs
- see how your efforts help raise standards
- do something positive for the next generation
- serve the local community
- help realise your own potential by learning new skills

Every school has a governing board. It is made up of:

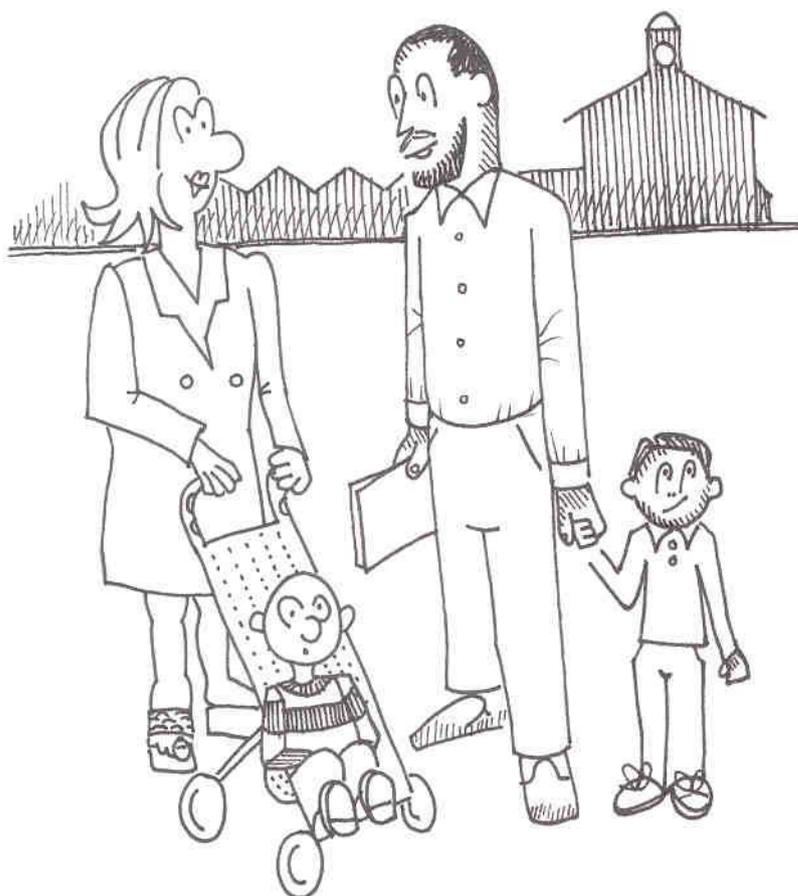
- parents elected by other parents at the school
- staff elected by their colleagues
- local authority governors
- governors co-opted by other members of the governing board
- usually the headteacher
- foundation governors if the school has a foundation or similar appointing board.

SCHOOL GOVERNORS AND OFSTED

In the OFSTED inspection framework September 2015, governance forms part of the judgement made for the effectiveness of leadership and management. In making this judgement in schools, inspectors will consider:

- the leaders' and governors' vision and ambition for the school and how these are communicated to staff, parents and pupils
- whether leaders and governors have created a culture of high expectations, aspirations and scholastic excellence in which the highest achievement in academic and vocational work is recognised as vitally important
- whether leaders have the highest expectations for social behaviour among pupils and staff, so that respect and courtesy are the norm
- the rigour and accuracy of self-evaluation and how well it leads to planning that secures continual improvement
- the design, implementation and evaluation of the curriculum, ensuring breadth and balance and its impact on pupils' outcomes and their personal, development, behaviour and welfare
- how well the school supports the formal curriculum with extra-curricular opportunities for pupils to extend their knowledge and understanding and to improve their skills in a range of artistic, creative and sporting activities
- how effectively leaders use the primary PE and sport premium and measure its impact on outcomes for pupils, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this
- how well the school prepares pupils positively for life in modern Britain and promotes the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith
- the effectiveness of the actions leaders take to secure and sustain improvements to teaching, learning and assessment and how effectively governors hold them to account for this
- how well leaders ensure that the school has a motivated, respected and effective teaching staff to deliver a high quality education for all pupils and how effectively governors hold them to account for this
- the quality of continuing professional development for teachers at the start and middle of their careers and later, including to develop leadership capacity and how leaders and governors use performance management to promote effective practice across the school
- how effectively leaders and governors monitor the progress of groups of pupils to ensure that none falls behind and underachieve, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this
- how well leaders and governors engage with parents, carers and other stakeholders and agencies to support all pupils

- how effectively leaders use additional funding, including the pupil premium, and measure its impact on outcomes for pupils, and how effectively governors hold them to account for this
- the effectiveness of governors in discharging their core statutory functions¹
- how well leaders and governors promote all forms of equality and foster greater understanding of and respect for people of all faiths (and those of no faith), races, genders, ages, disability and sexual orientations (and other groups with protected characteristics²), through their words, actions and influence within the school and more widely in the community
- the effectiveness of safeguarding
- the effectiveness of leaders' and governors' work to raise awareness and keep pupils safe from the dangers of abuse, sexual exploitation, radicalisation and extremism and what the staff do when they suspect that pupils are vulnerable to these issues.



1 *Governors' handbook*, Department for Education and National College for Teaching and Leadership, January 2015;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governors-handbook--3>.

2 As defined by section 4 of the Equality Act 2010

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD GOVERNOR?

It would be a pity if any keen and committed person was driven away by mistaken notions about governors having to have special skills or knowledge. The history of the school governor is all about the belief which people have had for centuries that education is not just a matter for educators, and that the precious light of 'ordinariness' must be allowed to shine on expert activities. So the first qualification must be ordinariness. Everyone has skills – listening, peace-making, organising, being willing to learn, having a willingness to commit time and talent. A good governing board will have a mix of these skills, and schools must make it clear that they're not just looking for accountants and lawyers.

The main requirements are:

- Interest in education and commitment to that school
- Tolerance and ability to work with others
- Patience
- Enthusiasm
- Willingness to learn
- Willingness to spend time getting involved in the school
- A strong feeling about doing things openly and democratically.

There is no one race, faith or social type who makes a perfect governor. Governors should be representative of the school community and a governing board will be all the richer for a diversity of backgrounds and beliefs.

The whole idea of governors rests on the fact that they are ordinary people from the local community served by the school, bringing everyday experience to task. It may seem a heavy responsibility but it is not one which you bear alone but only as a member of a team.

The question of loyalty

Individual governors are appointed by the LA or foundation, elected by parents or teachers, or co-opted from the local community. Each group brings with it a different viewpoint and represents a different interest.

It is important to understand the difference between a delegate and a representative. A delegate is there to obey instructions from an interest group and vote on every issue as instructed. Governors are not delegates.

A representative on the other hand is not obliged to vote in accordance with instructions but is obliged, if he or she has been elected or appointed by a group to listen, carry views and concerns to the governing board and report back.

The loyalty of every governor must be to the governing board, and the interest of a particular group – parents, staff, a political party – must never be allowed to divide governors from one another in their primary duty to the school and their commitment to

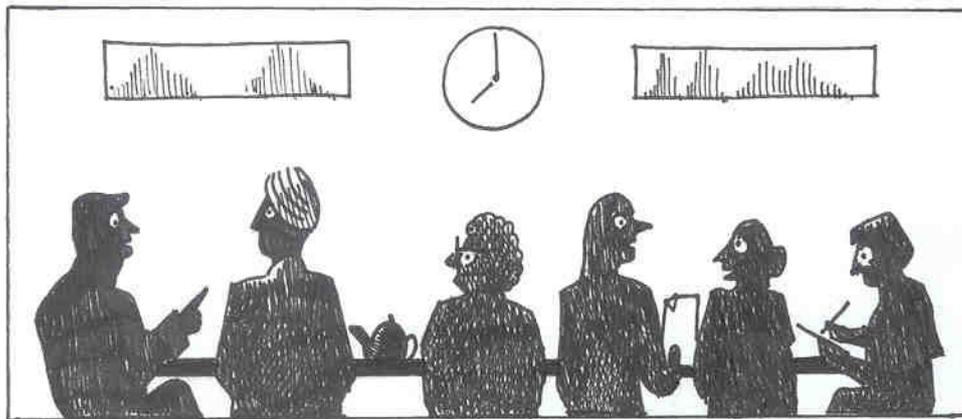
majority decisions.

In open debate with colleagues at properly conducted meetings and with the benefit of all available information, corporate decisions will be made. While different interest groups are deliberately brought together in a governing board to ensure its breadth and variety, the end product also reflects their influence on each other and their shared knowledge.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Governors are in a privileged position and often come into possession of information which in the best interests of all should remain confidential. Although commonsense suggests that certain matters should remain confidential, everything discussed at governors' meetings should be regarded as such. It is the published minutes which tell the outside world what has happened and nothing else.

It is important that all should feel free to speak openly in a meeting without the fear that anything discussed were to be bandied around the supermarket or appear in the local press.



GOVERNOR CATEGORIES

The size and makeup of a governing board is adopted in accordance with regulations relevant to the type of school. If you are interested in becoming a governor, an appointment can only be made if there is an appropriate vacancy.

Foundation Governors

In church schools (or schools established by other voluntary Boards) or foundation schools, these governors are appointed by the founding board to represent the interests of those who originally provided the school. Foundation governors have a particular responsibility to see that the school is run in accordance with the beliefs of the founding organisation. In many cases there is a trust deed which lays down certain principles which must be followed.

If you are interested in becoming a foundation governor at a particular school, you should get in touch with the chair of governors or headteacher who will then pass your details onto the appointing board for consideration should there be a vacancy.

Parent Governors

Parent governors are elected by the parents of the school. Parents, including carers, of registered pupils at the school are eligible to stand for election for parent governorship at the school. Parent governors are elected by other parents at the school in an election. If insufficient parents stand for election, the governing board can appoint parent governors. Only if insufficient parents stand for election can the governing board appoint:

- A parent of a registered pupil at the school, or if that is not possible;
- A parent of a former pupil at the school, or if that is not possible;
- A parent of a child of or under compulsory school age.

A person is disqualified from election or appointment as a parent governor of a school if they are an elected member of the local community or if they work at the school for more than 500 hours (i.e. for more than one-third of the hours of a full-time equivalent) in the school year at the time of election or appointment.

If you are interested in becoming a parent governor of a particular school, you should contact the headteacher, chair or clerk to the governing board to find out if there is a vacancy.

If an election is running and you are a parent or carer of a registered pupil, you will automatically receive an invitation to stand.

If more than one candidate is standing in an election, you should be prepared to make a written statement explaining why you are interested in becoming a governor.

Staff Governors

Both teaching and support staff paid to work at the school are eligible for staff

governorship. Staff governors are elected by the school staff and must be paid to work at the school; volunteers are not eligible. Any election which is contested must be held by ballot.

School staff who are eligible for election as staff governors (i.e. who are paid to work at the school) are not eligible to serve as LA governors or co-opted governors at their school. If they are paid to work at the school for more than 500 hours in a school year they are not eligible for election or appointment as parent governors. Staff can, however, vote in parent governor elections if they are parents and be governors at other schools. Their employment status will not affect their qualification for governorships in these categories at another school.

If you are interested in becoming a staff governor, you should contact your headteacher.

LA Governors

LA Governors are nominated by the LA (Local Authority) and appointed by the Governing Board. Under the Local Government Act 2000, LA Governor nominations are made by the Council or the Executive. At present in Barnet it is a Council function discharged by the Council or General Functions Committee.

If you are interested in becoming an LA governor you should contact your political party office who will make the appropriate recommendations. If you are not affiliated to a political party, you should contact Barnet Governor Services who have the power to pass on your details for nomination to vacancies that have existed in excess of 3 months.

A person is disqualified from appointment as an LA governor if they are eligible to be a staff governor of the school.

Co-opted Governors

Co-opted governors are appointed by the governing board to represent community interests. Co-opted governors can be persons who live or work in the community served by the school, or persons who do not work or live close to the school but are committed to the good governance and success of the school.

If you are interested in becoming a co-opted governor, you should complete an application form. You can request a form from Governor Services or can complete the form electronically on: <https://barnet.gov.uk/citizen-home/schools-and-education/schools-and-colleges/school-governors.html>

You may wish to contact the headteacher, chair or clerk to the governing board of your preferred choice of school for an informal chat.

Should a vacancy arise at your preferred school (if you have expressed a preference) or other governing board, your application will be forwarded to governors for consideration at the next meeting.

Once you have completed and returned a nomination form, your details will be held on file. When a Co-opted Governor vacancy arises on a Governing Board, Governor Services will forward details of suitable applicants to the Governing Board for consideration. The skills, interests and preferences of applicants will be matched to the needs of the school in question. Though there is no guarantee of appointment, do not be disheartened. The process for appointment could take a while and your patience is appreciated.

Sponsor governors

Sponsor governors are appointed by the governing board. It is at the governing board's discretion whether they choose to appoint sponsor governors or not. If the governing board wants to appoint one or two sponsor governors it must seek nominations from the sponsor(s). The governing board can appoint a maximum of two persons as sponsor governors.

Persons who give substantial assistance to the school, financially or in kind, or who provide services to the school can be appointed by the governing board as sponsor governors.

Associate members

The governing board can appoint associate members to serve on one or more governing board committee and attend full governing board meetings. The definition of associate member is wide and pupils, school staff and people who want to contribute specifically on issues related to their area of expertise (for instance finance) can be appointed as associate members.

Associate members are appointed as members of any committees established by the governing board. They are appointed for a period between one and four years and can be reappointed at the end of their term of office. Associate members are not governors and they are not recorded in the instrument.

ENSURING THE SAFETY OF CHILDREN

Any governor appointment is subject to satisfactory clearance and you may be asked to provide evidence of identity in order that the relevant checks can be carried out.

TERM OF OFFICE

The term of office for all categories of governor is four years, but the governing board can decide to set a shorter term of office for one or more categories of governor. Any governor may at any time resign by giving written notice to the clerk.

QUALIFICATIONS AND DISQUALIFICATIONS

A governor must be aged 18 or over at the time of their election or appointment.

A person is disqualified from being a governor or associate member if they:

- Are detained under the 1983 Mental Health Act;
- Have failed to attend the governing board meetings for a continuous period of six months, beginning with the date of the first meeting they failed to attend, without the consent of the governing board. This provision does not apply to the headteacher;
- Have been removed from the office of charity trustee or trustee for a charity by the Charity Commissioners or High Court on grounds of any misconduct or mismanagement or under Section 7 of the Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions)(Scotland) Act 1990 from being concerned in the management or control of any board;
- Are included in the list of teachers or workers prohibited or restricted from working with children or young people;
- Are disqualified from working with children
- Are disqualified from being an independent school proprietor or employee by the Secretary of State;
- Have been sentenced to three months or more in prison (without the option of a fine) in the 5 years before becoming a governor or since becoming a governor;
- Have received a prison sentence of two and a half years or more in the 20 years before becoming a governor;
- Have at any time received a prison sentence of 5 years or more;
- Have been fined for causing a nuisance on school premises during the five years prior to or since appointment or election as a governor;
- Refuse to an application being made to the Criminal Records Bureau for a criminal records certificate.

A person will be disqualified if:

- His/her estate has been sequestrated (temporarily repossessed) and the sequestration has not been discharged, annulled or reduced; or
- He/she is the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order or an interim order.

WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE?

There is expertise of all kinds available to governors as well as training and support. The London Borough of Barnet provides a wide range of support for governors including:

- A comprehensive termly Governor Development Programme
- Central training sessions
- School-specific school-based training and support
- Support and advice for individual governors
- A confidential helpline (020 8359 7622)

Barnet Partnership for School Improvement (BPSI) provides the following services:

Schools will be able to commission either a full *BPSI Governance Review* (the schools would be charged 10 'BPSI hours'); a *BPSI Governance Review Follow Up* (the schools would be charged 3 'BPSI hours'); or a *BPSI Governance Healthcheck* (the schools would be charged 5 'BPSI hours').

Links can be found to the following documents below:

1 **BPSI Governance Review**

http://webfronter.com/barnet/bspi/menu4/images/BPSI_Governance_Review_Report_-_Template_-_V06.doc

2 **BPSI Governance Review Follow Up**

http://webfronter.com/barnet/bspi/menu4/images/BPSI_Governance_Review_Follow-up_Guidance_and_Action_Plan_Template_-_V05.doc

3 **BPSI Governance Healthcheck**

http://webfronter.com/barnet/bspi/menu4/images/BPSI_Governance_Healthcheck_Guidance_Notes_and_Action_Plan_Template_-_V05.doc

STILL INTERESTED?

If you would like to speak to someone further, **please telephone Governor Services on 020 8359 7622.**

If you wish to be a governor at one specific school (for instance where your child attends) **contact the Chair of the governing board or the Headteacher at the school** to let them know of your interest.

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Basics for School Governors – Joan Sallis OBE
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National Governors’ Council Trigger Pack Series 4 – Welcome to Governance, a handbook for new school governors.
OfSTED – Inspecting Schools: Framework for inspecting schools.
The School Governors’ Handbook – E C Wragg and J A Partington

