

How to be an Effective Parent Governor

Why have Parent Governors?

The current model of governance in schools is a stakeholder model: people who are representative of all those groups which have a vested interest, or a stake, in the effective delivery of education and care in school have a voice in how their schools operate. This includes the parents of children at the school.

Is my role different?

The role of the parent governor is the same as any other governor and this should always be the starting point. Parent governors are like all other governors charged with the responsibility under the Schools Standards and Framework Act of 1998 to:

“Conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of education achievement” and like all other governors, parent governors too have three strands to the role:

- take a **strategic** view;
- act as a **critical friend**; and
- ensure **accountability**.

Representative not Delegate

What makes the reality of a parent governor a little different and sometimes can lead to parent governors questioning their role, is the extra dimension that having your own child attend that school, with all their experiences of being a child at the school brings. However, sometimes it can be difficult to separate any personal issues or experiences from those of being a governor. Parent governors should deal with personal issues in the same way as any other parent and not through their role as a governor.

Also, sometimes other parents do not understand that you are a delegate and not elected to represent them or their personal views. This may mean that whilst you may appreciate their views on an issue of strategic significance you have different views of your own.

Also, sometimes parents may feel that you should become involved in their child's issues with school or their complaint. In such cases you should always refer the parent to the head teacher and maybe the school's complaint procedure.

As a parent governor you may find situations where you need to act as a governor first to remind yourself that you are a representative parent and not the parent's delegate on the governing body.

It is not the role of the parent governor to hold surgery at the school gate to gauge the views of parents and carers on issues to be discussed at governing body meetings.

If the governing body agrees that it would like the views of a wider cross section of any stakeholder group it is for the whole governing body to decide how it wants to achieve this.

Are there things I cannot do?

As with all governors, parent governors should not be involved in hearing any cases or complaints where they have had any personal interests or involvement.

In these circumstances, the interest should be declared and the governor must withdraw from that part of the meeting. However, they are entitled to receive minutes of that part of the meeting, which in turn should be suitably and sensitively worded without referencing any individual by name.

Also, parent governors should not use the meetings as an opportunity to raise any personal issues or issues relating solely to their own child. If in doubt contact the chair of governors or the LA team for advice.

Induction Training

It is vital and strongly recommended that all governors, including parent governors, attend induction training. This course provides an invaluable insight into the role and responsibilities of all governors, emphasising that above all else governors share collective responsibility and that no governor or category of governor is any different to any other. If you are a new governor, talk to your Training Link Co-ordinator regarding booking onto a course.

Acting as the Critical Friend

Often parent governors that have lots of contact with the schools (maybe as a volunteer for example) report that they find this aspect of their role difficult. However, there may be occasions where additional sensitivity and diplomacy may be needed. Parent governors must put personal interests aside and participate in governor meetings in the interests of the school and specifically the interests of the children and young people in the school.