Organising Governing Boards

-for maintained schools

Part of the Governor Services *Introduction to Governance* Series

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OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

For school governors, trustees, academy committee members and school governance boards

Introduction

All schools are required by law to have a governing board.

This board is usually composed of **volunteers** who are appointed or elected to serve the school for a specified term of office (usually four years).

The board will have a range of **roles and responsibilities** linked to either their statutory duties or their school improvement work. The way the board is organised can help to ensure that these roles and responsibilities are undertaken in an efficient and effective way so that all pupils in the school benefit and all governors are involved in the work of governance.

More information about roles and responsibilities is available in the **Vision, Ethos and Strategic Direction** *and the* **School Improvement Cycle** *modules from this series.*

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Who is on your board?

Before a board can consider how to organise itself, it is important to know who can legally sit on your board.

This information is recorded in the **Instrument of Government** (IoG) for maintained schools.

This document records the agreed number and type of governors who can sit on each board and their term of office.

Consider your own Instrument of Government
Where is it available and when was it last reviewed or changed?
Which categories of governor do you have and which type are you?
Is your board full? If not, what skills are needed to strengthen your board?

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Reviewing the board

In all maintained schools and federations, the board should regularly review its composition to ensure it is the right mix for the school.

This review should consider whether the board:

- Is the **right size** to work efficiently

  Have you got the right number of governors?

- Has the **range of skills** needed to undertake the roles and responsibilities of the board effectively

  Have you got the right people with access to the right training?

- Is **succession planning** so that the board is always in a strong position to carry out its responsibilities and core functions

Information about the competencies required by any board can be found in the DfE's **Competency Framework for Governance**, the companion document to the Governance Handbook:

Competency Framework

Look at the anonymised skills audit for your school?
Which skills would *your board* benefit from?
What training would *you* benefit from?
Where can you access this training?

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Types of governor

There is more information about categories of governors in the Constitution Guidance.

In Oxfordshire, the main categories of governor are:

Constitution Guidance

Category	Elected or Appointed	Comments
Parent governors	Usually elected by the parent body	May be appointed if not enough candidates are nominated for the number of vacancies
Staff governors	Elected by staff	The position remains vacant if there are no candidates
Headteacher	*Ex officio* position	Headteachers can resign as governors
Co-opted governors	Appointed by the governing board	Candidates the board consider to have the skills required to support governance
Local Authority (LA) governor	Appointed by the governing board	The LA can nominate candidates but the board must decide if the candidate has the required skills
Foundation governor	Appointed by the 'person' identified in the IoG	The 'person' is usually the school's founding body, church or organisation (other than the LA)
Associate member	Appointed by the governing board	Their specific expertise and experience can contribute to good governance but **they are not governors and have limited voting rights**

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Organisation

With any group of people, organisation is the key to success.

All governors need to know:

- What their role is in governance

- How they will carry this role out

- How they will share information with the rest of the board

This **delegation** (or sharing out of the work) is crucial to good governance because of the amount and range of work there is.

While work may be undertaken by the full board, an individual or a committee, the responsibility always remains with the board. Because of this, any delegation should be agreed by the board and recorded in the board's paperwork as, for example, a delegation planner, a governor monitoring plan or as a 'minute' in the meeting records.

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Board organisation

There are two main types of board structure in Oxfordshire schools.

One uses a **committee structure**

- Committees undertake delegated work and report to the full board meeting
- Members of a committee may be further delegated to undertake work for the committee
- Committee meetings are timed so that the minutes from these meeting can be included in the next full board meeting

The other uses a **lead governor structure**

- All governors lead on different aspects of the work
- There are full board meetings monthly for a sharing of information and decisions
- Committees and panels are formed if necessary (such as the Pay Committee)

Whichever structure you use, this should be agreed annually and details should be published on your school website. Click on the link below to find out more about website essentials.

Website Essentials

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Which is best?

It is for the governing board to decide on the model that best suits them but points to consider might include:

- The meeting load for key governors (including the head)
- Duplication of work
- Pace of work
- Maintaining the vision and strategic direction
- Sharing information
- Involving all governors

Consider your board.
How is it organised?
How many meetings are there each year?
Are some committees more active than others?
How is information shared and is this effective?
How promptly are decisions, and the subsequent actions, taken?
How effective is the model you currently have?

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What needs to be done?

The Oxfordshire County Council **Annual Schedule** lists the main statutory work for your board.

A copy of this can be found in the Governor Services Toolkit:

Toolkit

Whatever the structure of your board, this work should be included.

In addition to the statutory work, you will need to organise the **school improvement work** for the coming year. This will include collecting and evaluating evidence from the school and its community to show whether the actions you are taking are having a positive impact on your children; this usually takes up about two thirds of the board's time.

More information about this is available in the **School Improvement Cycle** *module from this series*

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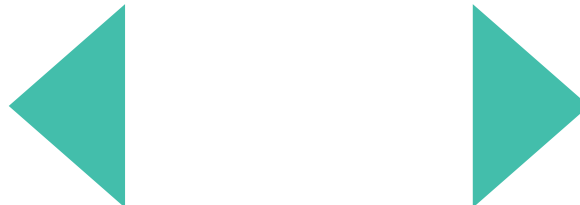
Working efficiently

Whatever structure your board decides upon, every governor must be clear about their role.
As the board is a corporate body (and governors cannot act individually without the agreement of the board), these decisions should be considered and agreed annually by the full board.

Useful documents to support this are:

Document	What is does
Standing Orders	Records the decisions of the board around statutory aspects such as committees, board meetings and urgent action
Delegation Planner	Records the annual decisions of the board concerning which statutory responsibilities will be delegated and to whom
Terms of Reference	Specifies the delegated work of the committee or individual
Code of Conduct	Records the agreed expectations of conduct for all governors
Governor Monitoring Plan	Records the monitoring evidence needed, the timings and the responsible person/committee

Other considerations

Once the general structure and organisation has been considered there are other decisions to be made.

These include ensuring you have:

- Meeting dates and times outlined for the year.

- An agreed policy review schedule for the year

- Lead governors for
  - Safeguarding (statutory)
  - Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as this is best practice
  - Other areas such as Health & Safety or Whistleblowing if required

- Agreed which governors will sit on the Headteacher Appraisal Panel. Best practice advice is for three governors.

Do you know the main organisational decisions of your board?
Can you name the safeguarding governor?
Who represents the board on the Headteacher Appraisal Panel?
Which policies are due for review this term?

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Summary

By knowing your board and the work for the school year, governors are able to organise themselves for success. Success here means positive outcomes for children and a move towards the school's vision.

- The agreed structure and delegation of the board should ensure **every governor has a role** to play and understands this.

- Meetings and monitoring plans should be linked to the **timeframe of the school** and to any **statutory deadlines**.

- Governors should ensure they have **completed their delegated work** in line with the plans so this information can inform the board's decisions and evaluation of impact.

- Reviewing the board in terms of **composition and structure** should be a regular event to ensure effectiveness, succession planning and stability.

- Publishing details of the **structure and responsibilities** of the board on the school website allows clarity for the school community and the wider community and is a statutory responsibility.

Additional support

Further information about your board's organisation will be available from your Chair or your governor mentor. *Please ask for copies of the key organisational documents if you have not seen these already. Check you understand your role in the process.*

Consider any other training needs you have. There may be other modules in this series that would help you in your governor role or you may benefit from joining one of our face to face training sessions. *Details of these are available on* **GovernorHub** *(www.GovernorHub.com) or by contacting* **Governor Services** *directly.*

If you have additional questions, do get in touch with Oxfordshire County Council Governor Services, who will be happy to support you:

Email: GovernorServices@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Phone: 03300 249046

Quiz and feedback

We hope you have found this introduction to **Organising Governing Boards** helpful.

Please use the link below to access the quiz and feedback.

Quiz

Thank you for completing this training and for your valuable feedback.

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