

South Bank Multi Academy Trust

Information for Prospective Governors

WHAT DO GOVERNORS DO?

Governors are volunteers who are responsible for strategic leadership and accountability within schools and academies. Their key functions are to:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school or academy and its pupils
- oversee the financial performance of the school or academy and make sure its money is well spent

In practice, this means that governing bodies are responsible for such things as:

- setting policies and ensuring they are adhered to
- setting and monitoring the budget
- monitoring the progress that the school or academy is making
- setting targets for school improvement
- leading the appointment of the Headteacher

These are only examples; there will be many other decisions regarding the strategic direction of the school or academy. All decisions are made in meetings as a collective group, with all governors having equal rights and status.

Governors are not involved in the operational running of the school or academy. The daily management is the responsibility of the headteacher. Governing bodies are accountable to several “stakeholders” for the way in which the school or academy is managed, including parents, pupils, the Trust, the local community and OFSTED.

Governing bodies will decide annually what committees they need. Usually these fall into categories such as curriculum and standards; staffing; finance; and premises. Sometimes one committee will cover more than one area to suit the needs of the school or academy. The governing body can delegate decision-making powers to committees which reduces the amount of work carried out at full governing body level.

WHO CAN BECOME A GOVERNOR?

There is a formal list of people who are disqualified from becoming a governor included within the governor application form. Apart from these disqualifications, however, almost anyone over the age of 18 can apply to become a governor if they have the skills and experience to offer the governing body.

Governing bodies vary in size and composition, depending on the setting. It should be remembered that all governors, including the headteacher, are equal in status and have equal voting rights.

In the South Bank Multi Academy Trust, governing bodies are comprised of:

- The Headteacher of the Academy
- At least one staff governor(s)
- At least two elected parent governors
- At least four co-opted governors, appointed from the school and local community on the basis of skills, experience and commitment

WHAT TIME COMMITMENT IS EXPECTED?

In most schools, meetings are held half-termly and dates are usually set a year in advance. Meetings usually last two hours and governors will be sent papers in advance for prior reading. This ensures that meetings can focus on discussion and decisions, rather than members reading papers in the limited meeting time available. Meetings vary in formality and frequency depending on the nature of the governing body.

Governors must also be committed to getting to know their school or academy. This will involve visiting the setting so that they can observe what goes on, and also occasionally attending events where they can meet staff and parents, e.g. school performances, parent consultation evenings etc.

All governors are volunteers and the time commitment expected is quite significant. Some employers may give 'reasonable time off' to employees so that they can undertake their duties. Individual governors would need to discuss this with their employer and establish whether or not the time off is with pay.

Most governors serve for a four-year term of office. Governors can resign at any point during their term and can request reappointment, or can be re-elected at the end of the period.

WHAT SUPPORT DO GOVERNORS RECEIVE?

All the South Bank MAT schools buy in support from the Governance Support and Development Service within City of York Council. This support includes access to a helpline during office hours, run by an experienced team who can provide advice and support on any governance matters; access to a website containing information and guidance on key issues; and a regular electronic newsletter providing up to the minute governance information. New governors will receive an induction pack and be invited to attend a 'Welcome to Governance' training session. This session introduces the three core responsibilities of governing bodies, explores the types of challenges governors may face during their time in post and provides the opportunity for governors to produce a personalised action plan for the year ahead.

A comprehensive programme of face-to-face and online governor training is also available and governors will receive a copy of the training programme at the beginning of each academic year – or on appointment. Fellow governors are also an obvious source of support. Some settings provide a mentor from their governing body who can guide new members in their first few months.

HOW TO BECOME A SCHOOL GOVERNOR

If you'd like to find out more about these important roles, please contact the Trust's Governance Adviser Sophie Triffitt on clerk@southbanktrust.co.uk or 01904 554210. You may also find it helpful to speak to the school's Headteacher or Chair of Governors, who can be contacted via the school.