



Becoming a
SCHOOL GOVERNOR
for people from all backgrounds

December 2020



Department of
Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk







BECOMING A SCHOOL GOVERNOR

Every school funded or grant aided by government is managed by a Board of Governors that works alongside the school Principal and senior staff to meet the educational needs of the school's pupils.

The role of the Board of Governors is to make sure that the school provides its pupils with a good education. The Board of Governors with the Principal set the plans and policies of the school, appoint school staff, manage the spending of the school budget and set and monitor standards within the school, all with the aim of driving school improvement.



The Board of Governors of a school has an important strategic role to play in the management of the school and to take corporate decisions in relation to their statutory functions. More information on the Board of Governors' roles including their statutory responsibilities can be found in the DE publication, a Guide to Governor Roles and Responsibilities, www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-governor-roles-and-responsibilities.

A school's Board of Governors is made up of parent and teacher members, members representing the owners or former owners of the school and members of the general public with an interest in education, who are appointed by the Department of Education or the Education Authority. Although nominated by different groups, all governors have the same role and voting rights.



You can watch a promotional video on the role of a school governor at <https://www.eani.org.uk/services/eatv/governor-videos/governors-support>



Who can be a school governor?

You must be over 18 to be a school governor – you don't have to be a parent with a child at the school and you don't need previous experience or qualifications. Training on the key roles and responsibilities of school governors will be provided.

Important qualities for being a school governor are enthusiasm, commitment, the ability to work in a team and a desire to ensure children receive the best possible education. Governors are expected to abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life – see Annex A.

A typical Board of Governors should be representative of people from the local community and will have a range of different skills, knowledge and experience. Governors do not need to be educational experts but should be supportive of the ethos of the school. The business of the school is progressed by the whole Board of Governors working together as a team in the best interests of the children and young people attending the school.

Governors are volunteers, they need a strong commitment to the role and to improving educational outcomes for children and young people. Every governor is expected to contribute to the conduct of school business and every governor can expect to learn something new. Being a school governor is an opportunity to help others and to develop skills.

We welcome applications for school governor positions from all sections of the community regardless of background, religious belief, gender, disability, ethnic origin, political opinion, age, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not you have dependants.





Becoming a

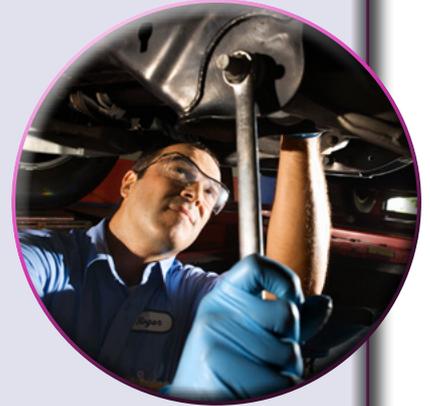
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Who cannot be a school governor?

You will not be eligible to be a school governor if:

- You already hold 3 school governor posts (unless there are exceptional circumstances approved by the Department of Education);
- You are adjudged bankrupt or under a composition arrangement with your creditors or you are subject to a Bankruptcy Restrictions Order (BRO);
- You are applying for a post in a school where you are employed;
- You are applying for a post in a school and you have a financial interest in the supply of goods or services to that school;
- You are applying for a post in a school which is registered by law as a company limited by guarantee, and you are disqualified by law from being a company director. (NB All grant maintained integrated schools and some voluntary grammar schools are registered as companies limited by guarantee);
- You have been convicted within the previous 5 years or any time thereafter of any offence with a sentence of imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of not less than 3 months without the option of a fine; or
- You are applying for a post in a school which is registered as a charity and you are disqualified under Article 86 of the Charities Act (NI) 2008 from being a trustee of that charity.



Conflicts of Interest

Anyone offered a school governor appointment must declare any conflicts of interest that might arise. Conflicts of interest are not automatically a barrier to an appointment. However, real, perceived and potential conflicts of interest must be considered to ensure confidence in the independence and impartiality of the Board of Governors and your position as a member. A conflict of interest could arise if you:

- are a relative of an existing governor or a member of staff of the school;
- have a child registered at the school; or
- are a teacher or the Principal of another school in the same community.

How much time does it take?

Boards of Governors are required to meet once per school term but in practice meet more often, perhaps monthly, depending on the size of the school.

You may also be asked to join committees covering different areas for example recruitment and selection or finance. A governor is appointed in a voluntary unpaid capacity for a four year term of office and can resign at any time. Travel expenses incurred may also be claimed through the school on which a governor serves.

Which schools need governors?

Controlled Schools are under the management of the Education Authority and include nursery, primary, secondary, special and grammar schools including a small number of Irish medium and integrated schools. Most controlled primary schools were originally set up by the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church in Ireland.

Catholic Maintained Schools are nursery, primary and secondary schools under the control of the Council for Catholic Maintained schools.

Voluntary Grammar Schools are self-governing schools catering for pupils aged 11 to 18.

Grant Maintained Integrated Schools are self-governing integrated primary and secondary schools.

Irish Medium Schools are self-governing primary and secondary schools in which pupils are taught via the medium of the Irish language.

Other Maintained Schools are self-governing primary schools. Only a small number remain.

You can find out more about the different types of schools on our website or by calling the contact numbers on page 6.



How can I become a school governor?

To become a Department of Education (DE) or an Education Authority (EA) governor you need to complete an application form.

DE selects governors for the Boards of Governors of:

- controlled nursery, grammar and special schools;
- catholic maintained schools;
- Irish medium schools;
- other maintained schools;
- voluntary grammar schools; and
- grant maintained integrated schools.

The EA selects governors for the Boards of Governors of:

- controlled schools;
- catholic maintained schools; and
- other maintained schools.

If you are interested in becoming a school governor you can:

- download an application form from the website; or
- request an application form from DE or the EA

Application forms are available online at:

www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-governor-appointments

or

<https://www.eani.org.uk/school-management/school-governors/application-process>

Alternatively you can e-mail or telephone the Department of Education or the Education Authority. Our contact details are set out overleaf.

AccessNI Basic Disclosure Check

Applicants applying to become a Department of Education governor will be subject to an AccessNI Basic Disclosure Check as part of the application process. Applicants should note that a criminal record will not necessarily be a bar to obtaining a position. The Department has a written policy on the recruitment of ex-offenders which is available at

<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/policy-recruitment-ex-offenders>.

The Department also has a written policy on the secure handling, use, storage and retention of disclosure information received in relation to criminal record checks. A copy of this policy is available on request from the Department using the contact details overleaf.

Department of Education

School Governance Team:	
Email:	govapps@education-ni.gov.uk
Telephone:	028 9127 9882 or 028 9127 9927

Education Authority

Email:	govsupport@eani.org.uk
Telephone:	028 3025 3189

The information contained in this document can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.



The Seven Principles of Public Life

The Seven Principles of Public Life apply to anyone who works as a public office-holder. This includes all those who are elected or appointed to public office, nationally and locally, and all people appointed to work in the civil service, local government, the police, courts and probation services, Non Departmental Public Bodies, and in the health, education, social and care services. All public office-holders are both servants of the public and stewards of public resources. The Principles also have application to all those in other sectors delivering public services.

- Selflessness** - Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- Integrity** - Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- Objectivity** - Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- Accountability** - Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- Openness** - Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- Honesty** - Holders of public office should be truthful.
- Leadership** - Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

The Role of School Governor

The aim of this short guide is to provide you with a brief overview and insight to your role and responsibilities as a member of the school Board of Governors.

Being a school governor is a challenging though immensely rewarding role which requires continued commitment throughout your term of office. It will provide opportunities for you to make a real difference both to young people through their education and development, and to the wider local community as a whole. Boards of Governors require a range of knowledge, skills and experience to enable them to challenge school standards and promote improvement.

It is important that governors are aware of their role. During their term of office they would be expected to:

- Attend and participate in Board meetings to consider all aspects of school business such as financial reports, the conduct of examinations and assessments in the school, school development and performance and recruitment and selection of staff. The Board of Governors meets as often as its business requires which could be once a month depending on the size and nature of the school and at a minimum of once per school term.
- Use their own knowledge, skills and experience in a new environment, combined with the abilities of other board members to govern, challenge and support the school leadership to promote school improvement in the best interests of pupils.
- Promote good governance by joining committees, or working groups covering different aspects of school business, for example, finance, staffing, admissions, health and safety, curriculum, discipline, complaints and, for example, attending training and school functions and reading/preparation of documents and materials for meetings.
- Increase their knowledge about the school and the wider educational system within Northern Ireland through training to gain a full understanding of procedures and guidelines which have been developed on various school issues such as child protection and safeguarding issues.
- Abide by the Seven Principles of Public Life – Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership. Governors also have a duty to ensure that the requirements of data protection and confidentiality are adhered to.
- Consider, declare and manage any conflict of interest either real or perceived, which could question the impartiality of the Board.
- Remain in office for the full term (normally four years), although you may resign if you wish during your appointment.



The Role of the Board of Governors

A schools' Board of Governors is made up of representatives from a wide range of interests and backgrounds with the shared goal of providing the best possible education and educational opportunities for all of its pupils.

As a member, you will be involved in setting the strategic direction for the school and taking corporate decisions in relation to the statutory functions of the Board of Governors. Example areas of responsibility include:

- Setting the school's vision, aims, plans and policies
- Establishing and maintaining the school's ethos
- Monitoring and evaluating school performance
- Managing school funds economically, effectively and efficiently in line with published guidance
- Curriculum planning, including examinations management and administration policy
- Employment issues
- Pupil pastoral care and protection issues

The responsibility for governing the school is shared by the whole Board of Governors. Governors participate in the decision making for a wide range of proposals and issues, and ultimately vote on and agree important changes which impact the school, pupils and staff.

Help and Support

A range of help and advice is available to all governors throughout their term of office from various sources:

- The school Principal, the Education Authority (EA) and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS).
- A training and support programme for members of Boards of Governors is delivered throughout each year by the EA; details are available on the EA website: <https://www.eani.org.uk/induction-for-new-governors>
- A full and comprehensive reference guide for the roles and responsibilities of school Boards of Governors is available on the Department of Education website: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/guide-governor-roles-and-responsibilities>

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