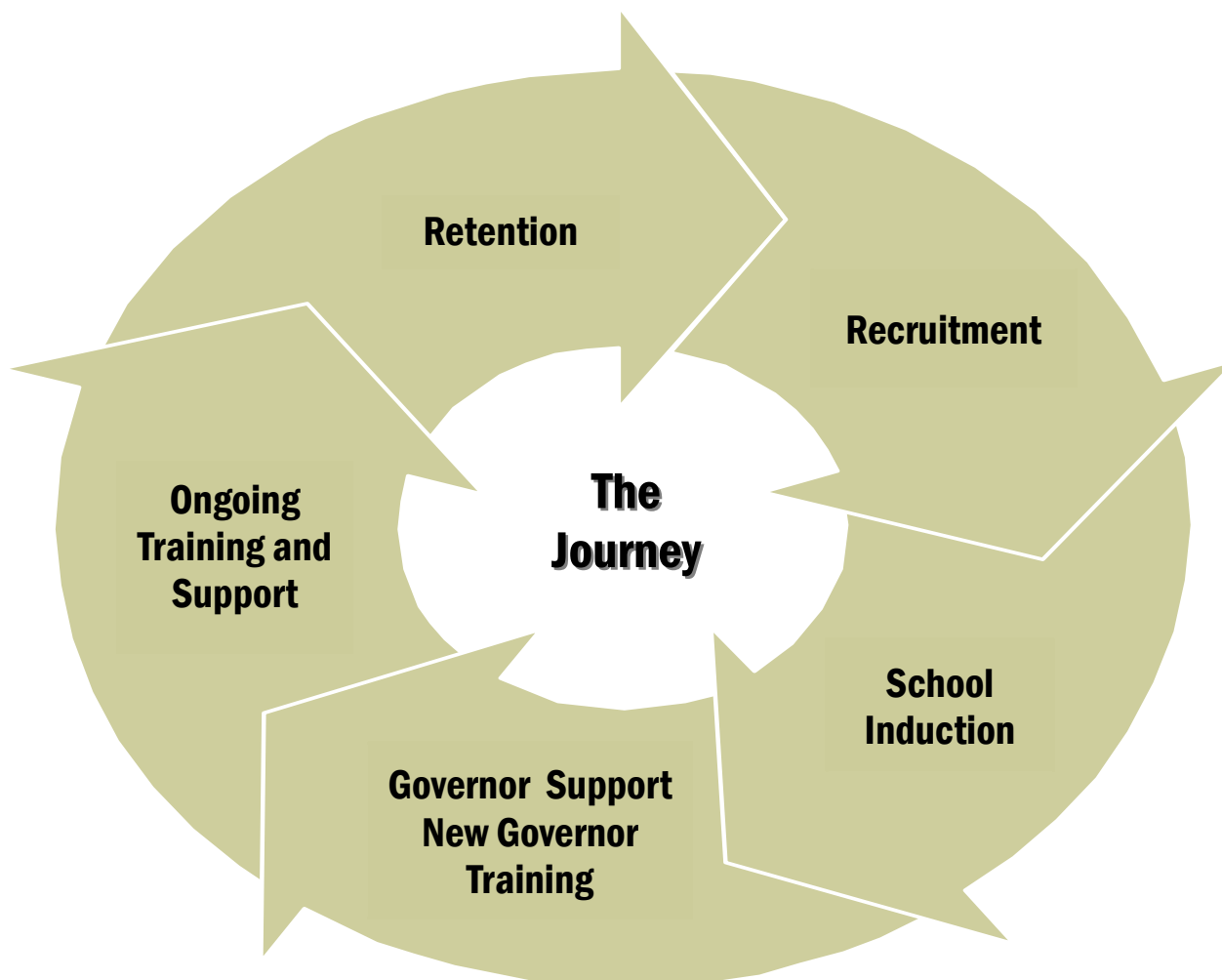


School Governor - Recruitment, Induction and Retention



Introduction

There is no definitive answer to the question of how best to ensure our governing bodies remain at full strength at all times. What works in one area may not be appropriate in another. What worked last year may not be so successful next time round. So perhaps the best way forward is for a variety of potential suggestions and solutions to be made available to supplement the local knowledge and expertise that already exists within the governing body.

This guidance document provides a number of ideas and suggestions that may assist you in the recruitment, retention and induction of governors within your governing body. This is supported by a number of downloadable leaflets, posters and other documents (to be found within the Governor Support pages of the Swindon Borough Council website — www.swindon.gov.uk) that can be utilised when undertaking recruitment activities.

1

Finding Governors: Recruitment

Governor recruitment activity can take place on four levels:

1. National promotions initiated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) working with the School Governors' One Stop Shop (SGOSS).
2. Local Authority wide promotions initiated by Governor Support.
3. Local promotions initiated by individual governing bodies.
4. Face to face recommendations by individual governors to friends and colleagues.

Whilst these activities are all valuable in raising awareness and generating interest, the more personal the approach the more effective it is likely to be. Recruitment should not be considered as an isolated activity to be undertaken only when a vacancy occurs, but one of a number of related areas that contribute to governor retention and governing body effectiveness.

External perceptions

A governing body that is seen to work well as a team, doing a good job and making a real difference can act as an ideal recruiting agent. High profile governor activity creates the positive image needed to encourage others to come forward. If you would like to raise the profile of your governing body, why not consider:

- Issuing a regular newsletter explaining the issues discussed by the governing body and the reasoning behind decisions taken? Also publicise outgoing and incoming governors. Give examples of how previous governing body decisions have affected the performance or perception of the school.
- Ensuring that written and verbal communications from the school to parents and the community give a real flavour of the work of the governing body?
- Ensuring that appropriate communications are jointly signed by both Headteacher and chair of governors?

A high turnover of governors or carrying a number of longstanding vacancies can give out negative signals when trying to recruit others. In certain circumstances it may be worth considering reducing the size of the governing body rather than carrying semi-permanent vacancies.

Planning

An effective governing body plans ahead when considering governor recruitment activities, rather than waiting until a vacancy arises. Why not undertake one of the following activities to help your forward planning?

- Undertake a skills audit and maintain a skills register. Ask governors to complete an appropriate pro-forma. The skills register will help you to decide what credentials you would ideally be seeking from new governors.
- Plan to fill particular skills gaps or under representations (e.g. disability, gender, ethnicity, age).

- Regularly review the start times of all your meetings Are they a discouragement to recruitment?
- Consider establishing links with other schools in your area by having a staff member or governor join your governing body.

It is important to remember that the ideal balance for a governing body is one of experience supplemented by a regular injection of fresh blood.

Publicity

In your recruitment materials you will need to generate interest and create a positive image.

- Try not to use dry, administrative terms such as ‘agenda’, ‘meetings’, ‘reports’. Instead refer to the subject matter such as ‘behaviour’, ‘curriculum’, ‘staffing’, ‘security’, ‘admissions’.
- Stress that decision making is collective and that no governor has to ‘go it alone’. Mention that training, support and expert help is always available.
- Don’t put people off by being too specific about the skills and experience you are seeking from new governors. General publicity should indicate that a wide range of complementary skills is being sought without seeming that “only professionals need apply”. If you have the luxury of being able to choose from a number of candidates then it may be appropriate to consider the specific skills requirements such as finance or personnel.
- Be realistic about the time commitment. Try to find an acceptable balance between ensuring candidates know what is required, whilst not overplaying the responsibilities and time commitment.
(Candidates must be ready, willing and able to serve on committees, attend meetings on a regular basis, do the necessary preparatory work, visit the school and undertake training)
- When seeking parent governor nominations, ensure the letter to parents is friendly and highlights the importance and rewards of being a governor and explains why parents need a voice on the governing body. Testimonials from retiring parent governors can bring these alive.
(The approach to staff governors can be similarly styled)

Responding to enquiries from potential governors

Generating enquiries from potential new governors is only the start of the recruitment process. Converting initial interest into commitment is the part that really matters. Although you will have your own individual preferences and styles when responding to enquiries, the four key essentials should be included in your response.

F	-	Friendly
A	-	Appreciative
S	-	Simple
T	-	Timely

A friendly, informal response puts enquirers at ease and can alleviate concerns they may have about putting themselves forward. Your response should leave enquirers in no doubt as to how much you appreciate and value their initial interest. Asking enquirers to fill out detailed application forms or write short essays can sometimes

appear impersonal and unappreciative. Basic details taken over the telephone should suffice at this initial stage. The speed of your response will also provide the potential governor with an impression about how your governing body conducts its business. A quick telephone call by way of acknowledgement on the day of receipt of the enquiry is FAST in every sense of the word and prepares the ground for a follow-up at a convenient time. Often the choice of follow-up may be based upon our first impressions of the quality of the potential recruit and may involve:

- an informal meeting with the chair or other representative of the governing body
- an informal meeting with a number of governors
- an informal meeting at the school with the chair and Headteacher
- an invitation to attend a forthcoming governing body meeting as an observer.

When responding to enquirers, try to remember how it was when you were in their shoes and were volunteering your own valuable time! How did the response you received make you feel?

Parent Governors

Parent governors are an important component in achieving an effective and well balanced governing body. An election procedure, providing model templates for use, can be downloaded from the governor support pages of the Swindon Borough Council website. If your governing body is having difficulty appointing parent governors you may want to consider introducing the subject of parent governors at an open evening or similar event for parents. Parents attending these events may be more receptive to a direct recruitment message than a more general written communication.

Don't forget to refer to the Guide to the Law when making appointments, to ensure the person being appointed isn't restricted from filling your vacant position.

Community Governors

An effective and well balanced governing body should comprise a range of complementary skills and experience and be representative of the community served by the school. Ideally, community governors should have an interest in local education, understand and care about the status of schools in society and wish to make a positive contribution to education and the community. The governing body is responsible for seeking nominations and co-opting community governors.

LEA Governors

Whilst the Local Authority is responsible for filling LEA governor positions, an elected member who is a regular visitor to the school and actively involved in school issues is more likely to be on the lookout for potential appointees. If an LEA governor position is slow to be filled or such an appointee is ineffective then keep up the pressure on Governor Support but also try to put forward names you have generated yourselves.

Staff Governors

An election procedure, providing model templates for use can, be downloaded from the governor support pages of the Swindon Borough Council website.

Partnership Governors

Partnership governors must be members of the community served by the school who are committed to the good government and success of the school. The governing body is responsible for seeking nominations and appointing partnership governors.

Foundation Governors

Foundation governors are appointed by the school's founding body, church or other organisation named in the school's instrument of government.

Recruiting governors from the business community

As well as the local community as a whole, you may also want to consider targeting local business when seeking governors to fill either LEA or community governor positions. People from the business community can bring a different perspective to the governing body. Volunteers with a range of transferable skills, such as finance or personnel can add value to and strengthen governing bodies.

Ensuring your governing body represents the community it serves

Governing bodies should be representative of the community served by the school. Where distinctive groups account for a proportion of the school intake then every effort should be made to ensure there is a representative voice on the governing body. This may require liaison with local community leaders who can help encourage potential volunteers to come forward whether for a parent governor election or as potential community or LEA governors. It may also be useful to target those parents who represent the diversity of the local community and who play an active part in the life of the school, as they may also be involved in local community groups. These same parents may also be willing to join the governing body if given a personal invitation. It should be noted, however, that a personal invitation should only be used as a last resort, as you would want to ensure that you provide opportunities for all members of your community to join the governing body. You may also want to consider producing recruitment materials and other communications from the governing body in other languages if appropriate.

Possible locations for displaying governor recruitment material

- School reception area
- Doctors and dentists waiting rooms
- Hairdressers and barbers
- Recreation Centre
- Golf clubs, sports clubs and gyms
- Parish notice boards
- Village halls and community centres
- Church halls and church notice boards
- Local post offices and shops
- Local businesses (for display in their staff room and public facing areas)
- Bank and building society branches
- Estate agents
- Library

Although recruitment is best undertaken using a variety of techniques and sources, most successful appointments are made by 'word of mouth', so encourage all governors to encourage their friends, colleagues and neighbours to consider becoming governors. But be careful not to overdo it!

2

Part of the Team: Induction

The quality of the induction process is vital in terms of new governors' first impressions, their progress towards effectiveness and the likelihood of their serving a full term or more. We should never leave new recruits to sink or swim. Some may be natural strong swimmers but many will flounder. As experienced governors, we should think back to when we were new trying to come to terms with unfamiliar terminology, a roomful of new faces and a pile of heavy reading.

Some governing bodies may find it useful to publish their own induction policy and review this from time to time. Although the content of the policy should ensure that the new governor feels able to contribute to the work of the governing body as soon as possible after their appointment, it is also important to remember not to overload them, so the policy will need to be well balanced, providing just enough support and information to make a new governor feel part of the team.

What should an induction policy aim to achieve?

- To make the new governor feel welcome immediately.
- To enable the new governor to be confident and contribute to debate.
- To ensure the whole governing body is aware of their particular skills, attributes and valuable fresh insight.
- To make available immediate training.
- To provide ongoing support – perhaps via a 'mentor' or 'buddy'.

Induction considerations ahead of the new governor's first meeting

The first steps taken by the governing body in welcoming and informing new governors will be determined by the circumstances surrounding their identification and nomination, so the early stages of the induction process need to be based on a common sense approach rather than prescriptive routine. However, there are a number of best practices we would recommend for you to pick and choose from;

- An introductory phone call from the clerk advising dates, venues and timings of meetings and describing the sort of documentation likely to be received ahead of such meetings and when and how these will be received. An overview of the committee structure could also be provided.
- A welcome phone call from the chair expressing thanks and giving a brief background to the main issues being discussed by governors.
- Allocation of an experienced governor to act as a mentor/buddy.
- A school visit prior to the first meeting.
- Provision of introductory information by way of a school specific induction pack.

Visiting the school prior to attendance at a governing body meeting

It can be very useful for a new governor to have an initial meeting, with key members of the governing body, Headteacher, chair, clerk, mentor/buddy, prior to attending their

first full governing body meeting. Make this meeting as informal as possible to put the new governor at ease. Perhaps consider providing some light refreshments. This meeting could include;

- A tour of the school and grounds, possibly conducted by a pupil.
- Discussion/overview of the following:
 - Duties and responsibilities of governors*
 - Brief overview of school aims, SIP, Ofsted, budget, staffing, premises*
 - Current issues of significance*
 - Minutes of last meeting*
 - Agenda for next meeting*
 - Class/school visits procedure*
 - Information on support and training available .*

You may also like to consider using this meeting to provide the new governor with their school specific induction pack.

Creating a school specific new governor induction pack

Although this should be selective to avoid overloading or intimidating the new governor, we would recommend that you include the following documents;

- Name and contact details of clerk and members of the governing body
- School Prospectus
- School Profile
- Calendar of all meeting dates for coming year
- Agenda and papers for next meeting
- Committee structure, membership and terms of reference
- School Improvement Plan
- Summary report from the most recent Ofsted Inspection
- School complaints policy
- Minutes from the last two full governing body meetings
- Staffing structure and school statistics
- Governing Body Scheme of Delegation
- Overview of governors financial responsibilities
- Governor Code of Practice
- A Guide to the Law for School Governors.

For best impressions the above documents could be packaged within a ring binder or lever-arch binder, complete with section dividers. The new governor should be advised, however, that they are not expected to read through all sections of the induction pack prior to their first meeting, although they may like to have read through them (apart from the Guide to the Law which is purely a reference document) within the first three to six months of their appointment.

Governor Support: new governor information pack

If your governing body subscribes to our 'Catalogue of subscription services and training' and following notification from your clerk that a new governor has been appointed, we send a pack of information direct to them, at the address we have been provided. The following is included within their pack;

- Welcome Card
- Instrument of Government
- Disqualification Rules

-
- Most recent edition of the Swindon Governor magazine
 - Information about and contact details for the Association of Swindon Governors
 - National Governors' Association — Welcome to Governance publication.

Please note: the welcome card informs the new governor that they have been booked on to the next available new governor training session. The new governor is advised to contact Governor Support to book on to another session, if they are unable to attend the session specified within their pack.

Induction considerations at the time of the first meeting

The first few minutes of the initial meeting can be very daunting for newcomers. As well as having made prior arrangements to arrive at the same time as the mentor, the following practices can help to make the new governor feel welcome and useful.

- Consider starting the meeting with five minutes informal social time so that the new arrival can begin to feel comfortable before the formal proceedings start. Lapel badges could be worn during this time.
- Have name cards on the desks/tables, slanted towards the new governor and get everyone to formally introduce themselves.
- During the meeting proper, try to avoid jargon and acronyms unless you are able to explain these to the new governor.
- Briefly explain the background to difficult or long running issues.
- Be encouraging and friendly at all times and make every effort to lighten the atmosphere whilst avoiding too many private jokes.
- Try and give new governors a modest task or early responsibility. The sooner they feel they are contributing the sooner they will find the role rewarding.
- Chair and Headteacher to chat with the new governor after the meeting about 'first impressions'.

Ongoing support

It is important to remember that the induction process for a new governor should last for 6 to 12 months. Over the first few months the new governor should be provided with;

- An opportunity to make a class visit with an existing governor or mentor/buddy.
- An opportunity to attend a meeting of each committee to gain an overview of the work of the governing body, before making a decision on which committee to join.
- Ongoing contact with the chair or mentor/buddy to provide support, advice and guidance on suitable governor training.

Why not ask a recently appointed governor if they would be willing to draft an induction policy if your governing body does not have one in place?

3

Retention and Succession Planning

Becoming or maintaining a well balanced and effective team is a key task of a governing body. Governing bodies who are successful in this area often find that they have a very low resignation rate for governors in their first term of office (discounting those whose circumstances have significantly changed) and a good proportion of experienced governors who are happy to serve additional terms of office.

If your governing body has a high turnover of governors, consider the following statements and how they might relate to your governing body.

- Are new governors brought up to speed and fully contributing within the first year so that they can offer, and feel that they offer, full effectiveness during their remaining term of office?
- Do governors focus fully, and expend all their energy, on the key responsibilities of a governing body?
Setting the strategic direction
Monitoring and evaluating school performance
Ensuring accountability
- Does the governing body achieve things and make a real difference to the school or does it feel more like a debating society?
- Is the whole greater than the sum of the parts? Do governors play to each others strengths or draw attention to weaknesses? Is there an atmosphere of mutual support, trust and encouragement and recognition that governors are unpaid volunteers?
There may often appear to be unequal contributions by individuals where contribution is assessed on a narrow range of measures. Always look at the wider picture before making judgements about individual effectiveness. Some people have more spare time and can visit the school more often. Others may have a very high level of a professional skill such as accountancy or personnel and contribute this willingly wherever possible.
- Are governors given, and do they accept, their share of responsibility?
There is a danger of under-utilised governors becoming de-motivated and deciding not to see out their terms of office. Similarly, over-utilised governors could become de-motivated if they feel that they are undertaking more work than others.
- Are governors encouraged to attend training? Is priority given to training that will improve teamwork and effectiveness? Are governors aware of the training and support available through Governor Support for improving governing body effectiveness?

- Are cliques and internal politics tolerated or is action taken to head these off at an early stage?
- Do experienced governors keep an eye out for colleagues who appear to be struggling to contribute? Is time taken to find out why?

Succession Planning

Just as for governor recruitment, the appointment of a new chair, vice chair, chair of a committee or a governor with a specific responsibility should be a planned activity. This avoids the need for panic should such a position become unexpectedly vacant. Ideally, a governor identified as a future chair should gain experience chairing a committee at an early stage with vice chair being the next step in the natural progression. Training courses for specific positions can also be attended by those 'in waiting' so that they can hit the ground running when elected to the hot seat.

Succession planning should be discussed at least once a year as an agenda item and on a regular informal basis between the chair, vice chair and clerk. Draw up "what if?" scenarios to anticipate future changes.

Further advice and guidance regarding succession planning can be obtained from the 'Succession Breeds Success: How to grow leaders in your governing body' publication, available to download from the Governor Support pages of the Swindon Borough Council website: www.swindon.gov.uk.