This is an extract from *Welcome to Governance 6th Edition* – the essential guide for newly appointed governors of state schools, published by the National Governors' Association ©2014.

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# What does a governor do?

**Role of a school governor:** To contribute to the work of the governing body in ensuring high standards of achievement for all children and young people in the school by:

- Setting the school's vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- Holding the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

Chair: ..... Vice chair: .....

Clerk: ..... Buddy/mentor: .....

## Activities: As part of the governing body team, a governor is expected to

1. Contribute to the strategic discussions at governing body meetings which determine:
   - the vision and ethos of the school;
   - clear and ambitious strategic priorities and targets for the school;
   - that all children, including those with special educational needs, have access to a broad and balanced curriculum;
   - the school's budget, including the expenditure of the pupil premium allocation;
   - the school's staffing structure and key staffing policies;
   - the principles to be used by school leaders to set other school policies.

2. Hold the senior leaders to account by monitoring the school's performance; this includes:
   - agreeing the outcomes from the school's self-evaluation and ensuring they are used to inform the priorities in the school development plan;
   - considering all relevant data and feedback provided on request by school leaders and external sources on all aspects of school performance;
   - asking challenging questions of school leaders;
   - ensuring senior leaders have arranged for the required audits to be carried out and receiving the results of those audits;
   - ensuring senior leaders have developed the required policies and procedures and the school is operating effectively according to those policies;
   - acting as a link governor on a specific issue, making relevant enquiries of the relevant staff, and reporting to the governing body on the progress on the relevant school priority; and
   - listening to and reporting to the school's stakeholders : pupils, parents, staff, and the wider community, including local employers.

3. Ensure the school staff have the resources and support they require to do their jobs well, including the necessary expertise on business management, external advice where necessary, effective appraisal and CPD (Continuing Professional Development), and suitable premises, and that the way in which those resources are used has impact.

4. When required, serve on panels of governors to:
   - appoint the headteacher and other senior leaders;
   - appraise the headteacher;
   - set the headteacher's pay and agree the pay recommendations for other staff;
   - hear the second stage of staff grievances and disciplinary matters;
   - hear appeals about pupil exclusions.

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## The role of governor is largely a thinking and questioning role, not a doing role.

A governor does **NOT**:

- Write school policies;
- Undertake audits of any sort – whether financial or health & safety - even if the governor has the relevant professional experience;
- Spend much time with the pupils of the school – if you want to work directly with children, there are many other voluntary valuable roles within the school;
- Fundraise – this is the role of the PTA – the governing body should consider income streams and the potential for income generation, but not carry out fundraising tasks;
- Undertake classroom observations to make judgements on the quality of teaching – the governing body monitors the quality of teaching in the school by requiring data from the senior staff and from external sources;
- Do the job of the school staff – if there is not enough capacity within the paid staff team to carry out the necessary tasks, the governing body need to consider and rectify this.

As you become more experienced as a governor, there are other roles you could volunteer for which would increase your degree of involvement and level of responsibility (e.g as a chair of a committee). This document does not cover the additional roles taken on by the chair, vice-chair and chairs of committees.

In order to perform this role well, a governor is expected to:

- get to know the school, including by visiting the school occasionally during school hours, and gain a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses;
- attend induction training and regular relevant training and development events;
- attend meetings (full governing body meetings and committee meetings) and read all the papers before the meeting;
- act in the best interest of all the pupils of the school; and
- behave in a professional manner, as set down in the governing body's code of conduct, including acting in strict confidence.

**Time commitment:** Under usual circumstances, you should expect to spend between 10 and 20 days a year on your governing responsibilities; the top end of this commitment, which equates to about half a day per week in term time, is most relevant to the chair and others with key roles, such as chairs of committees. Initially, we would expect your commitment to be nearer 10 days a year. However, there may be periods when the time commitment may increase, for example when recruiting a headteacher. Some longstanding governors may tell you that they spend far more time than this on school business; however, it is fairly common for governors to undertake additional volunteering roles over and above governance.

Under Section 50 of the *Employment Rights Act 1996*, if you are employed, then you are entitled to 'reasonable time off' to undertake public duties; this includes school governance. 'Reasonable time off' is not defined in law, and you will need to negotiate with your employer how much time you will be allowed.

**Expenses:** Governors may receive out of pocket expenses incurred as a result of fulfilling their role as governor, and NGA recommends that a governing body should have such an expenses policy. Payments can cover incidental expenses, such as travel and childcare, but not loss of earnings.

This document can be adapted for use in recruiting new governors.

**Academies** This description can also be adapted to cover the role of trustees. In multi-academy trusts, it will need to be reviewed for members of local governing bodies, which may not have all these responsibilities.