

# Governance Consultancy

## GETTING STARTED

*a brief guide for new governors*



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## Welcome to being a governor in Surrey

As a governor you are making one of the most valuable and worthwhile contributions to the education of young people in this county. On behalf of the elected Members of Surrey County Council and the Executive Director for Children and Young People, for the Local Authority, thank you for your commitment. There are 6267 governors in Surrey who, in partnership with headteachers, are responsible for educating more than 137,000 children in:

- 4 nursery schools
- 53 secondary schools
- 314 primary schools
- 37 special schools & Pupil Referral Units (PRUs)

Being a governor is a rewarding occupation. Like all activities worth doing it is demanding and, at times, difficult. This guidance and the attached Governance Consultancy Introductory Pack are designed to introduce you to the task of being a governor and to tell you where further support and advice are available when you need them. We hope that the information given here will not only help you to make a start on being a governor but will prove a useful reference document for the future.

If you need clarification, or any further information on anything in this guide or Introductory Pack, please contact Governance Consultancy and one of the team will be pleased to talk to you.

## What do governors do?

The purpose of each governing body is to:

- *'conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school'* (Education Act 2002, chapter 32, Part 3, chapter 1, paragraph 21 (2))
- fulfil its legal responsibilities for the curriculum, staffing, finance, premises and pupil behaviour and discipline
- act as ambassadors for the school in the community
- communicate openly with parents, the community and the Local Education Authority

Your clerk will have given you a CD Rom of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) *'A Guide to the Law for School Governors'*. This statutory guidance, as determined by the Education Act 2002 will help you understand the responsibilities of governors. Governing bodies must act corporately, with integrity, objectivity and honesty and in the best interests of the school. The main function of governors is to:

- provide a **Strategic view**
- act as a **Critical Friend**
- ensure **Accountability**.

The Induction training programme will explore these roles in depth, giving you the confidence to fulfil your responsibilities and so become an effective governor.

## What being a governor involves

- ❑ **Time** – as much as you can offer!
- ❑ **Meetings of the governing body** – there is a statutory requirement for governing bodies to meet three times per school year, however, most governing bodies choose to meet more often. There will also be committee meetings to attend
- ❑ **Visits** – visits to the school are an essential part of getting to know how the school works and time should be allowed for this
- ❑ **Support** – generally supporting the school by attending concerts, prize giving and fund raising events
- ❑ **Reading** – governors do not need to be education experts but in order to understand the role better there is an element of reading – Surrey Governor (formerly Director’s Report to Governors), DCSF documents, Policy documents etc.
- ❑ **Training** – will enable you to become more effective and, through attending courses, share good practice with other governors

## Governing Body Responsibilities

- ❑ **Financial**

The governing body need to be sure that an effective system of financial control is in place which safeguards all resources entrusted to the school and ensure they are used effectively. That the assets are safeguarded, transactions are properly authorised and recorded and that irregularities are either prevented or detected promptly and corrected. The governing body should reassure themselves and have confidence in their own monitoring of financial management, the scrutiny of financial reports and regular self-evaluation of the internal control systems. Whilst it is the whole governing body’s responsibility, the work is generally done through the Finance Committee.
- ❑ **Children’s welfare**

From 1 June 2004, new legal responsibilities for child protection came into place under the Education Act 2002, which places a duty on LAs and school governing bodies to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Governing bodies should ensure that the school has a child protection policy that is reviewed annually, is referred to in the school’s prospectus and conforms to LA and Area Child Protection Committee policy and guidance.
- ❑ **Accountability**

Effective governance is visible governance. Governors are accountable to all stakeholders in the school, including staff, pupils and parents and the profile of the governing body and its visibility to these groups should reflect this. Governing bodies should ensure they have a policy and processes for dealing with complaints.

## Training and Development

The Governance Consultancy Training and Development Programme includes Induction for New Governors Part 1 (The Strategic Role) and Part 2 (Accountability)

sessions which are designed specifically to introduce new governors to their statutory and strategic roles and responsibilities. Details of these sessions are shown in the termly Training Course Programme which are included in the Introductory Pack. Further training courses in the programme are designed for governors to build on their skills as they feel appropriate. Further help and advice on any aspect of governor training can be obtained by contacting Janice Beach, Training Co-ordinator [janice.beach@vtplc.com](mailto:janice.beach@vtplc.com)

Funding for governor training will come from the school's delegated budget, as part of it's training budget and most governing bodies use this to buy into the Governance Consultancy Training Packages via a Service Level Agreement, or Diocesan training. Before booking courses please check with your link governor, clerk or admin officer if your school have subscribed to one of these packages.

## Who can help me?

**Governance Consultancy Team:** For help and advice on governance issues and support on training and development for governors

**Clerk to the Governors:** Each governing body appoints a clerk to administer on their behalf. Many clerks (but not all) work at the school. Your clerk will contact you to let you know about meetings and is able to answer any questions you have about the governing body

**Link Governor:** The link governor acts as a liaison between the Local Authority and the governing body and is responsible for co-ordinating the training and development of governors. Many link governors also play an active part in welcoming new governors

**Chairman of Governors:** The chairman is responsible not just for making sure that meetings run smoothly but also co-ordinates the work of the governing body to achieve shared goals

**Headteacher:** As well as managing the school, the headteacher is usually a governor. This is the person you should approach to arrange a new governor's visit to the school and to find out about the day to day life of the school

**Diocese:** Governors of church schools are encouraged to contact their Diocesan Education Office for details of support and training specifically available to them.

**Associations:** The Surrey Governors Association, National Governors Association and GovernorLine are examples of sources of help and advice, other than

the Local Authority, that governors can access. Their contact numbers can be found at the back of this document

### **Local Education Officers**

The four Local Education Officers (LEOs) represent the Director of Education at a local level on a range of cross-service and inter-agency activities and supporting schools. In particular, LEOs can support governing bodies in resolving complaints and improving complaints management practice;

### **School Welcome Pack:**

In addition, the following information is useful in getting to know the school itself and the governing body:

- ❑ **School Development Plan (SDP)** outlining the direction the school is taking, its aims and goals and how these will be achieved
- ❑ **List of committees of the governing body** showing membership and terms of reference
- ❑ **School policies** such as Teaching and Learning, Assessment, Behaviour & Discipline, Special Educational Needs
- ❑ **School Profile**
- ❑ **Ofsted report**

The documents listed here will help you to understand the way the school and the governing body are organised and to get to know them as well as you can.

Do ask the clerk, headteacher, chairman or link governor for any other information you would like in order to learn as much as you can about the school.

## **Arranging a visit**

**Know your school** is a golden rule and one of the best ways to do that is to visit the school. If you have not yet received an invitation from the headteacher or chairman to visit the school do telephone the headteacher to make an appointment. If there were two or more new governors, it would save time and be useful to share your impressions if you were to visit together. To make the most of your visit, you should:

- ❑ **read** any material you have been given about the school
- ❑ **prepare** questions on anything which is unclear
- ❑ **identify** any areas you would like further information about
- ❑ try to include a **visit** to a classroom

Please remember that you are visiting to inform your knowledge of how the school goes about its daily business and not to inspect staff and pupils.

Apart from this introductory visit, there are many reasons for visiting the school. It is important to check your governing body's policy on visits. Ask the link governor or clerk about guidelines on structured visits agreed by your governing body.

## What else do I need?

### From Governance Consultancy

The Introductory Pack sent to all new governors by Governance Consultancy contains:

- ❑ **this booklet**
- ❑ **the Surrey Governor (formerly Director's Report to Governors)**, a twice yearly production that provides governors with guidance and information to help them in their statutory and strategic functions
- ❑ **a Glossary of Abbreviations**
- ❑ **the Governance Consultancy Training Directory** detailing training courses for governors that will help them fulfil their roles and responsibilities as well as full information on the functions of Governance Consultancy
- ❑ **an extract of Induction courses**
- ❑ **Instrument of Government** for your school
- ❑ **a leaflet outlining the services VT Four S offer**
- ❑ **finance – Introduction to School Finances**
- ❑ **Good Governance Guide 2 – Induction**, a guide outlining best practice for school based induction of new governors.

### From the school

All schools have a range of information that they send out to new governors. It would be impossible to let you have a comprehensive list but, as a start, the clerk should let you have a copy of the following:

- ❑ **School Prospectus** which often has a list of staff and their responsibilities as well as describing the school's ethos, pastoral and organisational structure
- ❑ **List of membership** of the governing body, the committee structure and their terms of reference
- ❑ **Agenda and papers** for the next meeting of the governing body with a copy of the minutes of the previous meeting
- ❑ **A CD Rom of the DCSF 'A Guide to the Law for School Governors'**
- ❑ **A Plan** of the school
- ❑ **Newsletter to Parents**
- ❑ **School holiday dates**
- ❑ **Complaints policy**
- ❑ **Child Protection policy**
- ❑ **Ofsted report**

## Preparing for your first meeting

While this may seem daunting at first, there are several things you can do to prepare yourself:

- ❑ **Make sure you have all the papers you need** - the clerk will send out the papers for a meeting at least seven days before it takes place and the covering letter

should list the contents so you can check that you have everything. If not, ring the clerk.

- ❑ **Read the agenda and minutes of the last meeting** - make a note of anything you don't understand, terms you are not familiar with and questions you would like to ask
- ❑ **Find out about the routine** - what time do people start arriving? Will there be refreshments on arrival or at a break in the meeting? How will you be introduced? Ask for others to introduce themselves. Making a plan of where each person is sitting as they introduce themselves helps to familiarise you
- ❑ **Arrive a little early** – to give you time to meet other governors in a more relaxed atmosphere
- ❑ **Listen to what is said and observe how things are done** - follow the style and see whether everyone uses first names or if there is a more formal style. Make notes and follow up any queries, if not at the meeting then soon after
- ❑ **Ask questions** - this advice holds good for all meetings, not just the first. An effective governor is one who listens, thinks and asks questions
- ❑ **Attend induction training** - has been designed especially for new governors to help you manage your important role effectively

## Contacts

**Governance Consultancy**  
**VT Four S Head Office and Development Centre**  
Bay Tree Avenue  
Kingston Road  
Leatherhead  
Surrey  
KT22 7UE

Team Contacts:

Tel:	0800 0734444 ext 835030
Fax	01372 834000
Email:	<a href="mailto:governance.consultancy@vtplc.com">governance.consultancy@vtplc.com</a>

## Other organisations

<b>SGA</b> - Surrey Governors Association	Sheila Danson (administrator) c/o Gordon's School, West End, Woking, Surrey, GU24 9PT	<a href="http://www.surreygovernorsassociation.org.uk">www.surreygovernorsassociation.org.uk</a> email: <a href="mailto:surreygovernors@hotmail.com">surreygovernors@hotmail.com</a>
<b>ACE</b> - Advisory Council for Education	1c Aberdeen Studios 22 Highbury Grove London, N5 2DQ	Tel: 0808 800 5793 (advice) 020 7354 8318 <a href="http://www.ace-ed.org.uk">www.ace-ed.org.uk</a> email: <a href="mailto:enquiries@ace.dialnet.com">enquiries@ace.dialnet.com</a>
<b>NGA</b> - National Governors Association	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor SBQ1 29 Smallbrook Queensway Birmingham B5 4HG	Tel: 0121 643 5787 Fax: 0121 633 7141 <a href="http://www.ngc.org.uk">www.ngc.org.uk</a> email: <a href="mailto:governorhq@nga.org.uk">governorhq@nga.org.uk</a>
<b>CASE</b> - Campaign for State Education	98 Erlanger Road London, SW14 5TH	Tel: 020 8942 2826 <a href="http://www.casenet.org.uk">www.casenet.org.uk</a> email: <a href="mailto:case@casenet.org.uk">case@casenet.org.uk</a>
<b>DCSF</b> - Department for Children, Schools and Families <b>DCSF</b> Publications	Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street London, SW1P 3BT	Tel: 08000 722181 (GovernorLine) <a href="http://www.governorline.info">www.governorline.info</a> <a href="http://www.governornet.co.uk">www.governornet.co.uk</a>
<b>ISCG</b> - Institute for School & College Governors	Avondale School Sirdar Road London, W11 4EE	Tel: 0845 602 6022260 <a href="http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications">www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications</a> Tel: 020 7229 0200 <a href="http://www.governors.fsnet.co.uk">www.governors.fsnet.co.uk</a> email: <a href="mailto:iscg@governors.fsnet.co.uk">iscg@governors.fsnet.co.uk</a>

Use this space to fill in the names and telephone numbers of the people listed below.

	Name	Telephone	email
Headteacher			
Chairman of Governors			
Clerk to the Governors			
Link Governor			
Diocese Education Office			