

# WILLOW TREE ACADEMY

Herringthorpe Junior School & Greasbrough Primary School

## INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE GOVERNORS

### Why Do We Have Governing Bodies?

A common principle throughout all publically-funded services in England is that those who lead and work in public services are held to account by a body of people who represent the users of that service and taxpayers more generally. In the case of schools this is the **governing body**.

### What Do Governing Bodies Do?

A governing body's main purpose is to help the school to provide the best possible education for **ALL** of its pupils and students. It fulfils this role in 3 main ways:

- By thinking and working **strategically** – by setting the school's values, vision and aims; agreeing challenging targets, policies and plans; and making creative use of the school's resources
- By acting as a "**critical friend**" to the head teacher and senior leadership team - monitoring and evaluating progress towards achieving the school's vision, aims and targets; providing support to the head teacher and staff as well as challenging their expectations
- By **holding to account** the head teacher and staff for the school's performance and for the decisions they take by asking challenging questions where appropriate.

### What Is The Head Teacher Responsible For?

The head teacher is responsible for the internal organisation, management and control of the school and for advising on and implementing the Trust and local governing body's strategic framework. This will include:

- Formulating the vision, aims and objectives for the school
- Formulating policies and targets to achieve the aims and objectives
- Providing a range of information to enable the governing body to monitor progress and evaluate impact of developments
- Reporting on progress at least once every school year

### Who Are The Governors?

As part of a multi-academy trust, Greasbrough Primary School has a Local Governing Body which is a formally constituted Committee of the Trust. The Local Governing Body consists of parents, staff, LA and co-opted governors.

Governors represent the different stakeholders associated with the school. This means that school decisions are made by people with a wide range of different viewpoints and experience. The different kinds of governors are;

**Co-opted governors** – individuals appointed by the other governors at a local governing body meeting. Co-opted governors can be individuals who live or work within the community served by the school, or bring skills and experience that the local governing body requires.

**Local Authority governors** – are appointed by the local authority, though they are not necessarily employees of the local authority.

**Parent governors** – parents or carers of children on roll at the school who have been elected by the wider parent body.

**Staff governors** – one staff governor position is reserved for the head teacher and, dependent on the number of positions, other places are held by teachers and support staff employed to work at the school. Staff governors, other than the head teacher, are elected by the body of staff employed to work at the school.

### What Makes An Effective School Governor?

- You want to make a difference to children and young people's lives
- You care about improving educational attainment at the school
- You want to work as part of a team, can value and respect the contribution made by different people and will accept collective responsibility for decisions made by the corporate governing body
- You are willing to listen, learn and to ask questions

- You are open to ideas and have a feel for what is important to people
- You are enthusiastic
- You can commit time and energy
- You will attend relevant training
- You are not doing it for your own selfish reasons

Head teachers and governors work very hard to develop positive working relationships. Much of this is about understanding the expectations of each other. The following list provides an overview of the expectations that head teachers have identified as being particularly important:

- Attend meetings regularly, be well prepared and, if you are unable to attend any meetings, send your apologies, with reasons, in advance to the clerk to the governing body
- Be interested and motivated, putting children and their learning at the heart of the governing body's decision-making process
- Promote the work of the governing body, the school and the success of its pupils and students in the community
- Be clear about the role of the governing body, and individual governors within it, and the role of the head teacher
- Be prepared to contribute at governing body meetings utilising any particular skills and experience you have to the full
- Be constructively challenging in governing body meetings acting as a supportive critical friend of the school who provides honest opinions and feedback
- Observe confidentiality and be loyal to corporate decisions
- Get to know the school as well as you can by, amongst other methods, undertaking structured visits to the school on a regular basis
- Don't try to solve complaints/grievances individuals may have with the school; there are agreed procedures for dealing with such issues

## How Do I Conduct Myself As A Governor?

As previously mentioned, school governors undertake a very important role in upholding a public accountability function, therefore it is important that governors conduct themselves and behave appropriately in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Willow Tree Academy Trust has delegated most governing body functions to the local governing body who work within a framework of policies and procedures set out in the Trust's **Scheme of Delegation**.

Willow Tree Academy Trust have a "*Code of Conduct for School Governors*". A minimum expectation is that school governors will adhere to the Seven Principles of Public Life outlined in the second report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (The Nolan Committee).

## Seven Principles of Public Life

**Selflessness** – Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family or their friends.

**Integrity** – Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their public duties.

**Objectivity** – In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for reward and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

**Accountability** – Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

**Openness** – Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands this.

**Honesty** – Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

**Leadership** – Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

## Maintaining Confidentiality

Whilst decisions that governing bodies make should be transparent and open to public accountability, there will be times when specific issues are discussed that will require strict confidentiality.

Governing bodies can determine whether specific issues should remain confidential. These can relate to:

- A named person who works, or who it is proposed should work, at the school
- A named pupil at, or candidate for admission to, the school
- Any other matter the governing body is satisfied should remain confidential

To enable governing bodies to make informed decisions about the school, they can sometimes be provided with sensitive and, at times, contentious information. It is therefore crucial that individual governors exercise the greatest prudence if a discussion of a potentially contentious issue affecting the school arises outside the governing body. How individual governors vote should always remain confidential.

## Dealing With Complaints/Grievances

Remember what was said earlier about the governing body playing a mainly strategic role? This is one of those areas where sometimes it can be difficult for governors, especially new governors, to know what to do.

The following should provide helpful guidance:

- The governing body must ensure that it has appropriate procedures in place to deal with such matters
- The head teacher is responsible for managing the school, not governors, and for implementing the procedures agreed by the governing body, therefore any complaints/grievances should be dealt with by an appropriate member of staff/head teacher as appropriate
- If you are approached directly, do not agree to “try to solve the problem” on behalf of the complainant. If somebody approaches you with a complaint/concern, remain impartial and non-judgemental and direct them through the proper channels – usually the class teacher or head teacher
- If a complaint/grievance cannot be resolved by the head teacher, it may be dealt with by a nominated group of governors (a designated committee).

## How Much Time Do Governors Give?

A governor’s term of office is usually four years, but governors may resign at any time. Individuals can be re-elected or re-appointed as a governor at the end of their term of office if they are still eligible.

During your term of office it is impossible to give a precise time commitment to the role; this will depend upon a number of factors including:

- How much time you can commit to the role
- Many times the governing body meets during the school year
- Any other roles you agree to undertake during your period of membership

The majority of governing body decisions are made in meeting which at Greasbrough take place half termly.

An effective governor will take some time before the meeting to prepare. This will include;

- Reading the agenda papers before the meeting
- Thinking about, and making an appropriate note of, questions you might want to ask at the meeting.
- Arrive at the meeting in good time bringing along your agenda papers, a pen and your diary!!

Don’t be afraid to ask any questions, even if it is just to clarify an issue or to ask for “jargon” to be explained; new governors are on a steep learning curve and will regularly come across acronyms or abbreviations that they don’t understand - don’t be afraid to ask for clarification; everyone was a new governor at some time!!

It is important for governors to get to know their school well and one of the best ways to do this is to visit the school during the working day, and it is good practice to arrange an early introductory session with the head teacher as part of your induction. As part of your induction to the role of governor, policies, such as that for Visits to School will be shared with you.

## Attendance at Governing Body Meetings

There may be occasions when you will be unable to attend a meeting. Whilst sometimes unavoidable, you do need to be aware that there are regulations about attendance at meetings.

Any governor who, without the permission of the governing body, is absent from meetings for a three month period, will cease to be a governor of the school. It is therefore vital that you inform your clerk to the governing body in advance if you cannot attend a meeting along with your reason for absence. Your reason for absence will be considered, and, where appropriate, governors will accept your reason for non-attendance and ensure this is recorded in the governing body minutes.

## Am I Entitled To Any Time Off Work To Undertake My Duties As A Governor?

Under employment law, employers must give employees who are school governors “reasonable time off” to carry out their duties. The employer and employee have to agree on what is “reasonable time” off. Issues to be considered when arranging time off with your employer include:

- How much time is needed to carry out your governor duties
- Whether the employee also has time off work for other activities
- The circumstances of the employers’ business and the impact the employee’s absence may have on it

Employers do not have to give time off with pay, but many employers do. If you are in paid employment, it might be worth asking your employer if they have such arrangements in place. If it will help matters, the school/chair of governors might also be able to write a supportive letter to your employer. A model letter is contained within another Governor Development guidance document entitled: “School-Based Induction for New Governors”.

## Is There Any Help With Expenses?

Becoming a school governor is a voluntary undertaking; therefore you are not entitled to payment of any kind for agreeing to carry out this role. Willow Tree Academy trust has agreed to reimburse travel costs (except overseas travel) incurred whilst carrying out their duties as a school governor.

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## What Training And Support Will I Receive As A Governor?

Your first point of contact for support is your governing body itself and support will start with the Induction arrangements for those new to governance at Greasbrough Primary School.

Governors are able to access a range of training opportunities which will be shared during Induction and meetings. Cost of training are met by the school.

## Why Are Certain “Checks” Made On School Governors?

The safety of all of our children and young people whilst in school is of paramount importance. In addition, there are certain restrictions placed on the ability of an individual to become, or continue in the role of, a school governor. This is why all newly and re-appointed governors are asked to complete and sign a **Declaration Form**.

The Declaration Form provides a list of those reasons that disqualify an individual from becoming a school governor and also provides the school with sufficient data to enable a check to be made against the **Children’s Barred List**. This is a list of individuals, maintained by the Independent Safeguarding Authority on behalf of the Government, which lists those individuals who are barred from working, or volunteering to work, with children.

An enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check for school governors is compulsory. Refusal to undertake such a check would result in your disqualification from continuing to hold office as a governor at the school.

## Further information

We hope that this brief introduction to school governance has answered many of the questions you may have. If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact the Chair of Governors via the school office.

Thank you for taking time to read this information.