

## DIY Guide Guidance for School Governors

### Role of the chair and vice chair

Being a chair of governors is a key role in the leadership and management of schools. To be effective, you need a good understanding of the role and its responsibilities so that your school gains maximum benefit from the work that you do.

An effective chair, supported by the vice chair of governors:

- works with the headteacher to promote and maintain high standards of educational achievement
- ensures that the governing body sets a clear vision, ethos and strategic direction for the school
- with the governing body holds the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils, and for the performance management of staff
- ensures oversight of the financial performance of the school and effective use of the schools resources

The key roles of the chair are outlined below:

**Leading effective governance:** giving the governing body a clear lead and direction, ensuring that the governors work as an effective team and understand their accountability and the part they play in the strategic leadership of the school and in driving school improvement.

**Building the team:** attracting governors with the necessary skills and ensuring that tasks are delegated across the governing body so that all members contribute, and feel that their individual skills, knowledge and experience are well used and that the overall workload is shared.

**Relationship with the headteacher:** Being a critical friend by offering support, challenge and encouragement, holding the headteacher to account and ensuring the headteacher's performance management is rigorous and robust; a good comparison is with the role of the chair of a board of trustees who works with the chief executive of an organisation but does not run day-to-day operations.

**Improving your school:** ensuring school improvement is the focus of all policy and strategy and that governor scrutiny, monitoring and challenge reflect school improvement priorities.

**Leading the business:** ensuring that statutory requirements and regulations are met, that the school provides value for money in its use of resources and that governing body business is conducted efficiently and effectively.

The chair plays a crucial role in setting the culture of the governing body and is first among equals, but has no individual power. The governing body is a corporate entity and its power and authority rest with the governing body as a whole. On occasions, the chair may need to take chair's action in an emergency, but any such action must be reported to the whole governing body as soon as possible.

The chair leads the governing board and ensures that it meets all of its legal responsibilities. A good chair will build an effective team, ensuring that all governors participate fully in meetings and committees, and will develop the knowledge, confidence and skills of the

governing board. The chair needs to be well informed about local and national issues and share this information with the governing board. He or she needs to have a close, supportive, but not exclusive, relationship with the head and a collaborative relationship with the vice chair.

### **Vice Chair**

The vice chair acts as chair when the chair is unavailable. In addition, if the chair resigns between meetings then the vice chair assumes the role of chair until a new chair is elected at the next meeting. It is therefore important that the vice chair fully understands the chair's role.

Each term chairs are invited to the chair's briefing to meet with the Director of Children, Young People and Learning and the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Learning to hear presentations by senior officers of the LA on current issues. If the Chair cannot attend the vice chair should endeavour to attend.

As well as deputising for the chair, the vice chair should maintain close liaison with the chair and support them in their role. They also usually take on specific responsibilities and the chair and vice chair should decide between themselves how the workload is divided, according to individual areas of interest and expertise.

### **Succession Planning**

Being vice chair is often used as a stepping stone to becoming chair and is a valuable opportunity to fully understand the role of being chair. The chair in turn needs to ensure that they involve the vice chair in their work so that this can be achieved.

### **Role sharing**

The Departmental Advice (The School Governance (Roles Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013 – Departmental Advice for school leaders and governing bodies of Maintained schools and management committees of PRUs in England, issued in January 2014, states that it is possible to appoint more than one person to share the role of chair, or vice chair, if the board believes this is necessary and in the best interests of the school. The board would need to ensure that any role sharing arrangement does not lead to any loss of clarity in its leadership. This is particularly important regarding the chair's ability to act alone in the event of an emergency. If this is something that your governing body wishes to pursue, it is imperative that it is agreed by the full governing body and is recorded in the minutes. This must clearly state the line of responsibility with particular regard to emergencies when a chair is empowered to act alone if there is no time to convene a full governors' meeting. If the chair is not available, the name of the next individual to be contacted and the level of their responsibility needs to be clear.

The National Governors Association has provided guidance on how sharing the Chair's role could work. This can be found on the NGA's website in the members' section. [www.nga.org.uk](http://www.nga.org.uk) If your governing body buys Governor Services from the LA through a service level agreement, you are automatically a member of the NGA and should have been issued with a password to enable you to enter the members area of the website.

NCTL developed the Chairs of Governors' Leadership Development Programme which provides opportunities for chairs and aspiring chairs to develop their school leadership skills and utilise these to promote school improvement.