

UNDERSTANDING HEADTEACHER & GOVERNOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Governors are required to operate at a **strategic** level, leaving the school's senior leadership responsible and accountable for the **operational** day-to-day running of the school. It is by achieving these aims that the school / academy develops effective governance. Outlined here are the three core strategic functions.

There are 3 core functions for Governors:

1. Ensuring clarity of Catholic vision, ethos and strategic direction
2. Holding senior/executive leaders to account
3. Overseeing the financial performance

Additionally, Foundation Governors in Catholic schools are appointed by the Bishop to work on as his representative to:

- To preserve and develop the Catholic character of the school/trust
- To ensure that the school/trust is conducted in accordance with its trust deed / governing documents which includes the provisions of:
 - ☐ Canon law;
 - ☐ The Curriculum Directory and Bishops' statements on religious education; and
 - ☐ Any Diocesan directives relating to schools.
 - ☐ [Any religious order documents relating to the conduct of the school].
- To become familiar with, to support and implement the policies and procedures of the diocese [and the religious order],
- To respond to the needs of the Catholic community as a whole as represented by the Diocesan Bishop;
- To attend relevant training including diocesan training as required by the diocese
- In all actions, serving as a witness to the Catholic faith.

Maintained school governor duties are set out here: [Maintained schools: governance guide - GOV.UK](#) and there is a separate document for schools in an academy: [Academy trusts: governance guide - GOV.UK](#). Governors and trustees set strategy and hold senior leaders to account – they do not get involved in the day-to-day running of the school or trust. Sometimes it's hard to walk this fine line, but these practical examples will help you clarify your role.

Area	Strategic (Governor role)	Operational (Senior Leaders' role)
Policies	Governors have an important role in contributing to the strategic direction of many policies, and in checking and approving some policies once they've been written. Governors also can hold the senior leadership team (SLT) to account for how policies have been implemented, and whether they've been successful.	The SLT or Trust will actually write and implement the policies – this is not for governors to do.
Pupil Premium	Hold the school accountable for how it spends its pupil premium funding (extra money for disadvantaged pupils). Make sure it's being used in accordance with the rules and is having an impact. Governors could do this through committee meetings, or by appointing a pupil premium link governor.	The SLT decides what to spend pupil premium funding on due to their understanding of the needs of these specific children. The SLT then implements the chosen strategies and initiatives.
Budgets	Governors should scrutinise the budget (or each school's budget if part of a trust). Governors in maintained schools approve and monitor it throughout the year. This helps governors meet their core responsibility to oversee financial performance and ensure public money is spent well. It also means governors can make sure resources are distributed in accordance with the strategic priorities and the school's or trust's ethos and values.	In a maintained school the school business manager (SBM) or Bursar presents the budget for approval and monitoring throughout the year, by the finance committee and/or the full board. In academy trusts, the chief financial officer (CFO) might work with each school's SBM to set the budgets.
Staff Pay	The Governor Pay Committee approves teacher pay recommendations once the recommendations have been made by senior leaders. Governors usually scrutinise anonymised reports to ensure governors do not learn individuals' salary details. If in an academy, this might be delegated to LGCs.	Senior leaders carry out appraisals themselves, and make sure teachers are appraised effectively and in line with the statutory requirements. They make pay recommendations and put them before governors pay committee.

Staff surveys	Governors might: • Decide to carry out a survey to find out staff's opinions on a strategically important issue – for example, a specific policy, wellbeing or overall job satisfaction • Have input into shaping the questions to make sure governors end up with the information governors need • Work with the SLT to identify strategic priorities based on the results of the survey, once it's been conducted • Hold the SLT to account for the success of any new plans or strategies put in place to correct the issues revealed by the survey	Someone on the SLT should do the leg work, essentially. This will include: • Carrying out the survey • Collating the results • Implementing actions or plans to address any issues raised by the survey • For example, the survey might indicate that staff don't feel they're involved in the decisions that affect them, so the headteacher/CEO might work on a new way of gathering staff feedback to inform decisions, and present this to governors • Reporting back to governors on how the new initiatives have gone
Parent Complaints	Governors should steer clear of getting involved in any parent complaints. This is so that they can remain objective and become involved if that complaint should ever be brought before the board. If a parent complains directly to a governor, that person should refer the parent to the school complaints procedure, without commenting on the complaint itself. Governors might: • Review the complaints procedures • Sit on the panel that hears complaints and makes a judgement	The SLT will: • Develop a complaints policy and take it to governors to review and approve • Handle the investigation and try to resolve the issue before it reaches the panel stage
Improvement Plans	Governors should have a monitoring role, to: • Check on the subject/department's progress • Hold the SLT to account for how it's leading/supporting performance and progress Senior leaders should report back to governor full board or the most relevant committee on a regular basis. They can update governors on the progress being made and provide governors with any data governors	The SLT should review the precise details of the plan, and effectively monitor it day-to-day to make sure the subject/department is making progress. They'll have the relevant professional experience to do this and are best placed to decide where amendments or improvements can be made. The subject lead/head of department may wish to present an overview of the plan to the governor board or committee, so that governors can be satisfied that a strategic plan is in place and progressing.

	ask for. This will help governors scrutinise the school's work effectively, and check the plan is being implemented properly. If the department isn't making progress, governors can ask the SLT to review the improvement plan and take steps to amend it.	
School Newsletter	Governors could speak to relevant staff about the newsletter within the wider context of the school's external communication strategy. This could help governors check that the school has a good plan for engaging with parents and/or other stakeholders.	Governors should not directly become involved with planning or writing the content.
Split-Year Classes	Some schools teach their pupils in split-year groups. This means teaching pupils from 2 or more consecutive school years in the same class. If this is being introduced, it is a major structural change to the school, which could affect the budget, resources and outcomes for pupils. For these reasons, governors should be consulted and consider whether there are good reasons for the change, such as: • Low pupil numbers • Financial/resource pressures • An evidence-based belief that it's a better way of delivering the curriculum Governors should also make sure that: • The proposal is in line with the ethos and values of the school • A process is in place for evaluating the impact of splitting the classes	The headteacher would produce a proposal to introduce split-year classes and present this to the governing board. They would then implement the change if agreed. If the size of the school PAN requires split-year classes anyway, who goes in which class is an operational procedure

Homework	This is very unlikely to have any strategic focus. Governors are advised to leave this one entirely in the hands of the SLT. Governors should not pass comment or get involved in controlling teaching and assessment methods.	It is for the SLT to discuss, decide on and implement any change to the way your school or the schools in your trust set homework. It would be a good idea for the headteacher to inform the governing board if they intend to change the way homework is given, or for the CEO to inform trustees. It could include it in the termly report to the board or raised in one of the regular meetings with the Chair.
Health and Safety Inspections	As employers, boards of trustees in academies and governing boards in voluntary-aided maintained schools need to make sure that premises meet health and safety requirements. This includes making sure that health and safety inspections are carried out regularly and efficiently. Boards do not organise or carry out specific inspections themselves, though governors are asked to perform a H&S walk around the school periodically.	Academy Trusts will cover all the work in this area. For maintained schools, someone on the SLT should research the best company and book the inspection.
Monitoring the single central record (SCR)	The governor with responsibility for safeguarding should make sure that the school is keeping up with its statutory duties by asking: •How complete the record is •How frequently it is reviewed and updated •How the information is stored	Senior leaders carry out the task of physically checking the SCR, making sure all of the relevant boxes are complete and that the document as a whole is up to date. In academies, this work may be carried out centrally.
Remote Learning	Governors make sure there is a contingency plan for remote learning in place. Governors may: • Ask why senior leaders have adopted their chosen approach • Monitor – for example, check that teachers are still able to monitor safeguarding and progress • Approve the remote learning policy	The SLT will organise the nuts and bolts of how remote learning will work. They will cover every detail, from what platform the school should use, to what work to set and how often, to who'll set and mark the work.

Challenge and support: What it Actually Means

Challenge and support are intertwined. It's about pushing for improvement and setting aspirational targets, and then supporting leaders to achieve them.

In a nutshell governors should:

- Challenge school leaders by asking hard questions to hold them to account. This is a key part of the governor role, and leaders will be expecting it
- Governors should challenge leaders on what they're doing in their role, rather than them as individuals – don't make it personal
- Governors should support your leaders by asking what the problems are and what they need to succeed, then really listen to them and do all they can to get that support in place.

A good school leader does not just want to be agreed with. S/he will welcome the challenge in order to ensure the best improvement for the children and school as a whole.

How to challenge

Challenge involves asking questions, but it shouldn't feel like an interrogation. Governors should think carefully about:

- What you want to know
- Why you need to know it
- What you want to do with the information

For example, if your school appears to be doing exceptionally well in one area, challenge by asking if the targets were realistic or perhaps too low, and whether your school could do even better.

If it's struggling in another area, challenge by asking why targets are not being met and then digging in further. Be clear that you're trying to get to a point where you can find solutions together – you're not trying to place blame.

Ask open-ended questions, such as:

- Where are we on...?
- How do you know...?
- How are you tracking progress in...?
- Why haven't we hit our targets in...?
- What's your strategy for...?
- What do you think we can do to...?
- What other factors might be involved...?

How to support

Governors are supporting school leaders when they:

- Really listen to the answers given
- Respect leaders expertise
- Demonstrate a willingness to champion the cause

There are 2 questions that can always be asked, whatever you're discussing:

- What do you need to deliver on your objectives?
- How can I help you get that?

Governors are also responsible for monitoring staff welfare, so do not lose the human touch.

Challenging Question Examples for Headteachers or Subject Leaders

What did you do to prepare to meet this target?

- Governors need to know what steps the teacher took to address the specific challenges of this cohort.
- Did they meet with the SEN co-ordinator to tailor reading plans?
- Did they research how to encourage reluctant boys to read?

What input did you have in setting the targets?

- Governors need to know how the targets were set and if everyone was in agreement.
- Do they believe the targets are reasonable? Why or why not?

How do you prioritise your tasks as literacy lead in the 30 minutes you get each week?

- Governors need to understand what they prioritise and why, and whether 30 minutes is enough to deliver on the objectives.
- How are they monitoring and supporting literacy across the school in 30 minutes a week?

How are other year groups doing against their literacy targets?

- Governors need to know for example, if the lack of progress is only in year 6 or if it's a wider problem. They might review last year's data against this term's test results to analyse progress.

What will improvement look like and when can we expect to see it?

- Put the ball in the teacher's court and let them take the lead. Even if you determine together that the original targets are unreasonable, keep challenging to ensure that the new targets continue to represent improvement.

You agree next steps by:

- Identifying what actions need to take place.
- Determining the deadlines for those actions.

Supporting question Ideas

What do you need to deliver on these objectives?

- Governors need to know what the teacher needs in terms of time, support and resources. Really listen to their answers.
- Acknowledge their expertise, but don't be afraid to push back if you think they're actually capable of delivering more with the right support.

How can I/we help you get that?

- It's a governor's job to go and champion this cause and try to get them what they need.