

Information for STAR governors

What do governors do?

Governors are volunteers who are responsible for strategic leadership and accountability within our schools and academies. Their key functions are to:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school or academy and its pupils
- oversee the financial performance of the school or academy and make sure its money is well spent

STAR MAT's local governing bodies (LGBs) are responsible for such things as:

- ensuring policies are adhered to
- monitoring their school's budget
- monitoring the progress that the children in the school are making
- setting priorities and targets for school improvement
- supporting the Trust Board with the appointment of a headteacher

The full list of responsibilities is captured in the Scheme of Delegation for the LGBs. All decisions are made as a group, with all board members having equal rights and status.

Governors (and indeed Trustees) are not involved in the operational running of the schools. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the headteacher. However, the LGBs are accountable to several stakeholders for the way in which the school or academy is managed. These stakeholders include: parents, pupils, the local community, OFSTED, the Trustees of the STAR MAT.

What happens at LGB meetings?

Currently, our LGBs have 9 full board meetings a year.

All decisions are decided at a meeting of the LGB, or one of its delegated committees.

The LGBs have an agenda planner to guide their business throughout the year. This ensures that all strategic and statutory duties are covered. Governors are expected to use their skills, knowledge and experience to support and challenge the school's leadership on a range of topics, including: school development, enactment of policy and financial probity.

Who can become a governor?

There is a formal list of people who are disqualified from becoming a governor or trustee included within the governor application form. Apart from these disqualifications, however, almost anyone over the age of 18 can apply to become a governor if they have skills and experience to offer.

Categories of governor and how they are elected/appointed

The LGBs vary in size and composition, depending on the setting, but the number of governors in each category is set according to the Trust's Articles of Association. Within STAR, all LGBs consist of the school's Headteacher, a Staff Governor, two Parent Governors (elected by the parent body, although the LGB can appoint a parent governor in certain circumstances) and a number of Trust Appointed Governors (previously categorised as Co-opted Governors). Additionally, our CE schools have governors appointed through the Diocese of York.

What time commitment is expected?

The dates for the scheduled LGB meetings are set in advance and each meeting lasts around two hours. Governors receive the meeting papers a week in advance in ordinary circumstances and governors are expected to allocate some preparation time for the meetings. This preparation ensures that meetings can focus on discussions, actions and decisions in the limited meeting time available.

Governors must be committed to getting to know their school. This will involve visiting the setting so that they can examine what goes on and should also involve attendance at events where they can meet staff and parents and be generally visible within the school community. Further to getting to know their school, governors are also expected to support the school and the LGB with formal monitoring visits, linked to school priorities, which will allow the board to assess how successfully the school's leadership is delivering local and Trust strategy.

Governors must also commit to training and professional development in their role. The Trustees have to ensure that each LGB contains people with the necessary skills, knowledge and commitment to take their school forward and maintain the highest standards of governance.

Most governors serve for a four-year term of office, as defined in the Articles of Association. Governors can resign at any point during their term and can also request reappointment or to be re-elected (if still eligible) at the end of the period.

All governors are volunteers but the Trust recognises the time commitment expected is quite significant. Some employers may give 'reasonable time off' to employees so that they can undertake their duties. Individual governors would need to discuss this with their employer and establish whether or not the time off is paid.

What support do governors receive?

The STAR MAT buys in support from the Governance Support and Development Service within City of York Council. This support includes access to a helpline during office hours, run by an experienced team who can provide advice and support on any governance matter; access to a website containing information and guidance on key issues; and a regular electronic newsletter providing up to the minute governance information.

New governors receive an induction pack and are invited to attend a 'Welcome to Governance' training session. This session introduces the three core responsibilities of governing boards, explores the types of challenges governors (and Trustees) may face during their time in post and provides the opportunity for governors to produce a personalised action plan for the year ahead.

A comprehensive programme of face-to-face and online governor training is also available and governors receive a copy of the training programme for the year ahead at the beginning of each academic year (or upon appointment).

Governor colleagues and Trustees are also a source of support to new board members and, to that end, the STAR MAT has an induction process for new governors. New governors will have the support of a mentor and will be made aware of the position of the school and the LGB they are joining upon appointment.