

Chair of Governors Role Description and Expectations at the STAR Multi-Academy Trust

Background

This briefing paper and role description has been generated, consulted and agreed using NGA guidance. It aims to serve the purpose of achieving a transparency of understanding for those who are in the role or aspire to the role of Chair of Governors within our Trust, along with all stakeholders with whom they interact.

Executive summary

The role of the chair of governors should be viewed in the same light as that of the chair of the board in any other sector. The role of the chair is demanding, complex and multi-faceted. The chair leads the governing board ensuring it fulfils its functions well. A good chair will ensure the board's focus is on the strategic. The culture of the board is largely determined by its chair. The chair is "first among equals" but has no defined individual power. A good chair works well with school leaders to advise and shape proposals to be discussed at the board meetings.

The chair should facilitate the governing board working as a team to challenge, support and contribute to the strategic leadership of the school. As well as leader of the board, the chair is at times a confidante, a manager, a critical friend, a cheerleader, an ambassador, an arbitrator, and possibly a mentor and coach; the balance of these roles adopted will depend on the situation at hand and in particular the experience and strengths of the headteacher.

Role Purpose: Leading governance in schools

To provide leadership to the governing board and ensure that governors fulfil their functions for the proper governance of the school(s).

Leading governance in schools

- To ensure that the governing board and headteacher have a shared sense of purpose.
- To ensure the governing board sets a clear vision and strategy for the school(s).
- To lead the board in monitoring the headteacher's implementation of the school strategy.
- To act as the link between the Trust and the governing body and ensuring that the governing body delivers the STAR Multi-Academy Trust's founding ethos and vision as the school continues to develop.
- The chair acts as the link between the Trust and governing body, ensuring effective and regular two-way communications, transparency and alignment of action.

Leading and developing the team

- To ensure the board has the required skills to govern well, and that appointments made fill any identified skills gaps.
- To ensure all governors receive appropriate induction, ongoing training as needed and have a thorough understanding of their role.
- To ensure members of the board act reasonably and in line with the board's agreed code of conduct.
- To develop a good working relationship with the vice chair, ensuring s/he is kept fully informed and delegating tasks as appropriate.
- To ensure that board members feel valued and encourage their development.
- To carry out a performance review of each governor.
- To ensure that there is a plan for succession for the chair, vice-chair and any link roles, and that by recommending limits on office, there is always a mix of new and experienced members.

The chair, the headteacher and accountability

- To build a professional relationship with the headteacher which allows for honest conversations, acting as a sounding board and ensuring there are no surprises at meetings.
- To meet regularly with the headteacher, which in normal circumstances is likely to be monthly.
- To ensure that there are transparent and effective processes for the recruitment and induction of the headteacher.
- To ensure appropriate governor/trustee involvement in the recruitment of senior leaders.
- To ensure all governors concentrate on their strategic role, receive information fit for purpose and hold the headteacher to account.
- To oversee and participate in the headteacher's performance review, ensuring that appropriate CPD (continuing professional development) is provided.
- To ensure that the headteacher provides staff with an understanding of the role of the governing board and acts as link between the two.
- Where required, represent the governing board in its dealings with external partners and be an advocate for the school.
- To attend school functions (plays/sports days/prize giving) as appropriate and encourage other governors to do so.
- To ensure that complaints made to the governing board are dealt with in a timely and effective manner.
- The chair will also play a lead role in any decision to suspend the headteacher.

Leading school improvement

- To ensure the board is involved at a strategic level in the school's self-evaluation process and that this feeds into the key priorities.
- Ensure that school improvement is the focus of all policy and strategy and that governor scrutiny, monitoring and challenge reflect school improvement priorities.
- To ensure the board's business is focussed on the key strategic priorities.
- To take the lead in representing the governing board at relevant external meetings with agencies such as Ofsted, the Department for Education and the local authority where appropriate.
- To ensure the board has mechanisms in place to obtain and listen to the views of parents, pupils and staff.
- To ensure the governing board adopts a visits protocol which is linked to monitoring key strategic priorities:
 - The chair who should already have a good knowledge of the school will need to consider whether s/he needs to continue such formal monitoring visits or whether these are now best delegated to the team.
- In our church schools, the chair also needs to lead the Board in their corporate responsibility: for ensuring that the school upholds its trust status as expressed in the ethos statement for Church of England Voluntary Schools

Leading governing board business

- With the clerk and the headteacher, using the framework provided by the Trust, to plan for board meetings, ensuring that agendas focus on the board's key responsibilities and strategic priorities and reducing unnecessary paperwork.
- Ensure that the work of the governing body follows the vision, ethos and strategic direction as set by the Trust for the school.
- Chair meetings effectively and promote an open culture on the governing board that allows ideas and discussion to thrive whilst ensuring clear decisions are reached as quickly as possible.
- To collaborate with the clerk to establish effective working procedures.
- To ensure that decisions taken at the meetings of the governing body are implemented.
- Ensure that governing body business is conducted efficiently and effectively and, with the governing body:
 - hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its students, and for the performance management of staff.
 - ensure oversight of the financial and operational performance of the school so that the school's leadership team are making the most effective use of the school's human, financial, and physical resources.
 - ensure that all statutory and regulatory requirements are fully met, in its use of resources.

What skills/attributes should a chair have?

An effective chair works well with school leaders to advise and shape proposals to be discussed at the full governing body meetings. They ensure that governors are working as a team to challenge, support and contribute to the strategic leadership of the school. As well, as the leader of the governing body, the chair will be at times a confidante, a manager, a critical friend, an ambassador, an arbitrator, and a role model. The balance of these roles will depend on the situation at hand, the experience of the headteacher and expectations of the school's various stakeholders.

Candidates for chair should be able to demonstrate a good selection of the skills/attributes set out below:

- Commitment to the school
- Good understanding of the environment in which the school is operating and wider education policy
- Personal integrity
- Negotiation and diplomacy skills
- Good understanding of the legal responsibilities of the board as both individuals and a corporate entity
- Strong communication skills
- Good organisational skills
- Ability to think strategically
- Ability to prioritise
- Ability to chair meetings well
- Ability to have courageous conversations and make courageous decisions
- Ability to build and get the best out of a team
- Capacity to process information quickly and understand relevant data
- Ability to delegate

As board members for the school and for the Trust, an equal opportunities employer, all governors are expected to have a commitment to diversity and equal opportunities. Our Chairs of Governors are expected to be positive advocates of all aspects of inclusion equalities and diversity.

What are the extra time commitments?

The expected time commitment is likely to be about 90 to 130 hours (over 30 to 50 days) per year, with the bulk of the commitment during term time. This is made up of planning, preparation and participation in the meetings of the governing body and its committees, regular contact with other governors (particularly the committee chairs), regular contact with the headteacher, attendance at school events and undertaking ad hoc meetings with parents and external parties, such as the DfE and community stakeholders. If a chair finds their commitment is significantly more than this then it may be productive to sit down and work out what they are spending their time on, whether it is strictly necessary and/or whether it can/should be delegated to someone else.

Training and Development

Continuing professional development is a vital aspect of all who work in governance within the Trust. For Chairs of Governors it is vital that training and wider reading and research is maintained:

- Attend Trust Chairs Forums, briefings and ensure all briefing materials are appropriately circulated and acted upon
- Attend relevant training as required – as required by regulations, identified by the governing body training schedule, as an outcome of the governors' skills analysis process etc.
- Keep up to date with changes and trends in the educational landscape especially political, regulatory and financial trends.
- Seek a suitable mentor to support personal development.
- Develop vice-chairs' capabilities.
- Seek opportunities to connect with and build mutually beneficial dialogue with other chairs in particular those within the Trust
- Seek feedback from vice-chairs and governors on own performance.

- Provide developmental support and any requested onboarding support to an identified successor.
- Consider taking part in an annual performance review with a governor/ Trust member.

Outcomes for Success

At the end of their first year in office, the new chair of governors should have:

- Established their position as the leader of the governing body, championing governor colleagues to support and challenge the delivery of the school development plan and improve academic and wellbeing outcomes for students.
- Built a strong, open, honest and mutually respectful relationship with the headteacher, acting as a supporter and critical friend and providing constructive challenge.
- Worked with the Trust to ensure that the school continues to deliver its vision and values and those of the Trust.
- Supported the school to navigate the current economic and political environment and the related challenges and constraints.
- Acted as an advocate for and representative of the governing body, both internally and externally, establishing mutually respectful relationships with key stakeholders including parents, partner institutions, local representatives, and members of the wider community.