



## The role of a Parent Local Governor

This guidance is intended to help parent governors understand how to separate their role as a governor from their role as a parent, thereby enabling them to manage their relationship with other parents and perform effectively as a governor.

### 1. The role: summary

Parent representation on governing boards is important, but it should not be confused with the board's responsibility to ensure effective parental engagement. Parent governors bring the perspective of a parent to board meetings and discussions. They do not serve as the sole voice of parents or serve as their advocates.

The role of a parent governor is:

- To bring a **parental perspective** to the issues discussed
- Not to speak "on behalf" of the parent body
- No different to other governor. Governing boards make strategic decisions and work together to:
  - develop a vision and strategy for the school
  - oversee financial performance and make sure money is well spent
  - hold the headteacher to account for the educational performance of the school
  - engage with pupils, staff, parents and the wider school community to understand their views

### 2. Offering a parent's perspective

Parent governors offer a parental perspective to issues being discussed; however, they are **not expected to represent the parent body** or act as a spokesperson. Bringing a parent's viewpoint to the board is important but should not be confused with the board's overall responsibility to engage with parents as a collective. Parent governors should use their perspective as a parent to help the board understand a parent's viewpoint thereby helping the board make good decisions and maintaining a link between governance and the parent community.

The [Academy trust governance guide](#) states that parents or carers:

- *can help boards stay accessible and connected to their local community*
- *bring a parental viewpoint to the trust*
- *add to the board's range of perspectives to support robust decision-making*
- *are there to represent the interests of the trust and all its pupils and not to promote the interests of their own child or the interests of other parents' children"*

Parent governors need to remain impartial, especially when posing challenging questions to school leaders. In practice, this means that the role of a parent governor is not to bring complaints from parents to the board's attention, rather it is to highlight how governing board decisions impact the school from a parent's perspective. For example, if school uniform is discussed at a governing board meeting, parent governors may well have opinions based on personal experience or that of other parents, but should ensure their questions remain objective.

Example	Do ask ...	Avoid saying ...
<b>School uniform change</b>	<p>'Has the school consulted parents on the proposed uniform changes? If not, why not?'</p> <p>'How has the school explained the proposed changes to parents?'</p> <p>'Has the school considered the cost of this change to parents and what opportunities are there to minimise the cost of this change?'</p>	'As a parent, I've spoken to other parents in the playground and we all think the uniform shouldn't change.'
<b>School dinner menu change</b>	<p>'How have parents been consulted on the new menu?'</p> <p>'Has the school explained to parents the reasons behind the change?'</p> <p>'What alternative provision is available for pupils whose parents disagree with the menu changes?'</p> <p>'How will this change impact parents?'</p>	'Parents have come up to me asking why the menu has changed. They say they prefer the old one.'
<b>Curriculum change</b>	<p>'How has the school communicated the curriculum change to parents?'</p> <p>'Have parents been given the opportunity to ask questions and get further clarity?'</p>	<p>'Parents want to me express to you that they disagree with the changes. They don't feel the changes reflect what they want their children to be taught.'</p> <p>'A number of parents have told me they're confused about why the curriculum has changed.'</p>

It is important to keep governing board matters **confidential**. Parent governors must avoid sharing concerns away from the board meeting or discussing with other parents. Instead, it may be helpful to discuss any issues with the governing board's chair.

### 3. Setting expectations with other parents

This helps other parents understand that a parent governor's role is not to:

- Speak on their behalf
- Bring up their individual issues in governor meetings
- Solve problems for them

Governors may be approached by parents wishing to raise a complaint. However, it is not the parent governor's role to attempt to resolve individual issues. Instead, they should remain polite but firm, and direct parents to the school's complaints procedure and avoid making promises to investigate the issue. It is helpful for parent governors to become familiar with the school's complaints procedure and staff list.

If parent governors are approached by another parent or parents with a grievance, it may be helpful for them to remember:

- **Do** ask the other parent to put it in writing and follow the school's complaints procedure. Advise the parent how and with whom they can raise their issue. This also helps to identify genuine complaints.
- **Do** explain what the role of parent governor actually is. For example, "*Parent governors don't speak on behalf of the parent body, instead we bring a parental perspective to the strategic decisions the governors make*"
- **Not** to agree to raise it at a meeting or look into it for them – this will set a precedent and could cause problems later down the line as the correct procedure has not been followed.
- **Not** to respond to comments on social media in their parent governor role. Governors might see comments about the school from parents on social media, perhaps in parent groups they have joined. However, it is not a governor's role to become involved.

#### **4. Separating the role as a governor from the role as a parent**

- While all parents are concerned with their own child's best interests, governors must make strategic decisions that are in the best interests of the whole school community – governing boards work as a team to make collective decisions. Parent governors have to consider all pupils, not just their own child. Parent governors, along with other governors, are responsible for the progress and wellbeing of **all** pupils at the school, so it is important to bear this in mind during meetings.
- All governors must rely on a wide range of sources to make decisions and hold the headteacher to account. These include high-quality, objective data and the views of pupils, staff, parents and the community.
- When discussing issues in meetings, parent governors should:
  - Remember that they are acting in the interests of the whole pupil body
  - Avoid referring to their own child, or referring to anecdotal evidence based only on their child's, or a friend's, experience
- If a parent governor has a complaint concerning their own child, they must follow the school's complaints procedure like any other parent. In all communication during the process, the parent governor must clarify that they are acting as a parent, not a governor.
- Action could be taken as a governor, however, if the complaint affected more children than the parent governor's own child. For example, if data showed a wider problem with pupil progress in their child's year group, questions could be asked in the relevant meeting.

**Ask:** What support is in place to ensure all pupils make good progress?

**Avoid asking:** What are you going to do to support my child to catch up?

- If a parent governor has a concern about a governing board decision, it is important that they remember to keep their role as a parent separate from their role as a governor. If they have a concern, they should:
  - Raise it in a governing board meeting. Meetings are designed for this purpose: governors can openly discuss decisions the governing board might take, and governors can express disagreement by voting against it
  - Respect the decision taken by the board if it has been voted on properly
  - Ask for a meeting with the chair to discuss a decision in more detail if they wish
  - Not express their disagreement outside governing board meetings
  - Not involve other parents or seek to mobilise them in any way

#### **5. Dealing with conflicts of interest**

All governors must declare business or personal interests that might affect their ability to make impartial decisions. Parent governors may need to declare an interest and remove themselves from a meeting where the outcome of a decision could **directly** affect them or their child – for example, changes to after-school provision that the parent currently uses or an exclusion panel where their child was involved in a behaviour incident.