

# **Being an E P Collier Governor: For Potential New and Existing Governors**

**From September 2015**

## **Executive summary**

This document provides guidance for the governing body (GB) of E P Collier Primary School (EPC) with particular regard to the purpose of the Governing Body and how the purpose will be delivered. This document also serves as guidance for potential new governors, to help them understand what is involved in being a school governor.

In all respects information and guidance from statutory and official sources such as the Department for Education and the Local Authority has precedence.

## **Background**

The DfE and Local Authority have high expectations of governing bodies. They are the strategic leaders of schools and have a vital role to play in making sure every child gets the best possible education. For EPC this is reflected in the law, which states that the purpose of maintained school governing bodies is to 'conduct the school with a view to promoting high standards of educational achievement at the school'.

## **Our purpose**

The EPC GB will have a strong focus on three core strategic functions:

- a. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction;
- b. Holding the Head Teacher to account for the educational performance of the school and its pupils; and
- c. Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent.

These functions are reflected in regulations for maintained schools that came into force in September 2013 and in the criteria Ofsted inspectors use to judge the effectiveness of governance in both maintained schools and academies.

This is a demanding role for the Full Governing Body (FGB). Evidence suggests that we will deliver it well by:

- understanding our strategic role – building a productive and supportive relationship with the Head Teacher while holding him/her to account for school performance and taking hard strategic decisions in the light of objective data;
- ensuring we have the necessary skills and commitment, including to challenge the school to bring about improvement and hold leaders to account for performance;
- appointing an effective chair to lead and manage the governing body;
- appointing a high quality clerk to advise on the nature of our functions and duties and ensure the governing body operates efficiently and effectively;
- evaluating our performance regularly in the light of Ofsted expectations and other good practice and making changes as necessary to improve our effectiveness.

## FGB organisation and business

The FGB consists of 10 governors:

- Two parent governors
- One Local Authority governor
- One staff governor
- One Head Teacher
- Five co-opted governors

*Two or more Associate Members may also be appointed*

The term of office for Local Authority, Parent, Staff and co-opted governors is four years with the ability to be reappointed or re-elected twice. This means no individual will be a governor for more than 12 years. Associate Members will be appointed for specific activities and their term of office will not exceed four years.

The FGB shall meet at least once every term and a maximum of twice every term (i.e. between six and twelve times in a school year, typically none times). The FGB standing agenda is likely to include some or all of the following items:

| Item                     | Comments   |
|--------------------------|--|
| Apologies                | Not all governors will be able to attend all meetings however, to ensure the relevant meetings can function notification of non-attendance ('apologies') must be provided at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting in writing (email or hard copy) to the Chair (in the case of the Chair providing 'apologies' they should be sent to the Vice Chair) and Clerk. Failure to provide apologies in advance will result in the governor recorded as 'absent'. |
| Declaration of Interests | If there is any matter where one or more governors has or have an interest those governors are required to declare that interest. It may be necessary for those governors to leave the meeting whilst that item is discussed. An example might be a discussion on teachers' pay or conditions.   |
| Previous Minutes         | The opportunity for governors to point out an item that is incorrectly recorded or missing from the written record. Whilst this can be done at the meeting it is more usual and helpful for any such observations to be made to the Clerk when the minutes are published.  |
| Actions                  | Work through the actions and for the action owner to report what has happened.   |
| Governance Matters       | Updates from committee or working party chairs; written updates in the form of minutes or otherwise will be published in advance and may be sufficient however specific items may need to be brought to the FGB for information or action (e.g. a vote).   |
| Single Plan Update       | An update on progress towards the published 'single plan' by exception. In other words if all the items in the plan are complete the item can be quite short. Single plan must always have a time horizon of the current plus five terms (i.e. 12 months).   |
| Strategic Plan Update    | An update on progress with key relevant items on the published 'strategic plan'. The strategic plan must always have a time horizon of at least three years.   |
| Performance Update       | Update on academic performance based on the most recent data. Data to be trended such that the impact of previously announced interventions can be monitored (i.e. did the intervention achieve the intended impact). There will be a formal Head Teacher update summarising the results and actions taken and to be taken at least once every two terms (i.e. three times a year).  |
| Statutory Policy Review  | Model policies are, generally, provided by the Local authority however the FGB is required to amend them to reflect the particular requirements of EPC. Policies are subject to a review cycle and this standing item is the opportunity to vote on any policies that have been reviewed. Such reviewed policies must be made available in advance of the meeting with authors notified of any major items of concern.   |
| Urgent Updates           | Items of an operational nature the Head Teacher or, possibly, another governor wishes to bring to the attention of the FGB for information or action.  |
| Meeting Reviews          | Based on the three key purposes of the FGB, review the meeting and see if anything significant has been missed.  |

## Governor expectations

- Take an interest:
  - keep up to date with published information including meeting papers
  - read and understand performance statistics
  - attend meetings and participate actively
  - read and understand papers for meetings in advance
  - prepare questions and comments in advance of meetings
- Professional development:
  - Complete a skills audit and agree with Chair what development is needed
  - Attend relevant training and complete necessary Modern Governor modules
  - Spend time in the school observing at least once per school year
  - Network with governors at other schools to seek 'best practice' on at least one occasion every school year
- Respect confidentiality:
  - It is important that governors share information however some things must be kept confidential
  - Sometimes the FGB agrees that a matter is confidential and everyone must abide by that decision
  - Minutes of meetings where confidential items are discussed are referred to as Part 2 minutes and are kept separate and do not form part of the public record
  - Whether a matter is confidential or not, outside the meeting, you should only discuss the decisions made, not who said what or which governors supported or opposed a decision
  - As a governor you may be privy to information which may not be specifically confidential, but it would be inappropriate to talk about to others
- Collective responsibility:
  - Governors have no power as individuals, that lies with the GB as a whole
  - In some exceptional circumstances (usually an emergency) the Chair / Vice Chair can act without consulting other members of the FGB
  - The FGB may delegate its responsibilities to committees or to an individual governor (e.g. the Head Teacher)
  - When parents or others bring a matter of concern to you, your first port of call should be the Head Teacher - do not try to deal with the matter yourself
  - Decisions are normally taken by the FGB by consensus, but exceptionally the FGB may take a vote to make a decision
  - Once a decision is made, all governors must support the decision
- Know which hat you are wearing:
  - Governors often have two roles in the school, as governor and as parent, employee or helper; keep these roles separate – when you are a governor you act like a governor
  - As a parent governor you are not at meetings to represent parents (you are a representative of them)
  - Staff governors sometimes feel uncomfortable as governors, challenging decisions made by the Head Teacher who is their line manager – however the role of governor is clear
  - These adjustments can take a bit of practice but most people manage it well

A couple of practical matters:

- Please use a secure email address and account for governor business;
- Be prepared to read governor papers and other information online, often via the school website;
- Should you wish to visit school, please first agree the visit with the Head Teacher.

### **Questions for governors to ask**

- Which groups of pupils are the highest and lowest performing, and why? Do you have credible plans for addressing underperformance or less than expected progress? How will we know that things are improving?
- Which year groups or subjects get the best and worst results and why? How does this relate to the quality of teaching across the school? What is your strategy for improving the areas of weakest performance?
- How are you going to raise standards for all children, including the most and least able, those with special educational needs, those receiving free school meals, boys and girls, those of a particular ethnicity, and any who are currently underachieving? How will we know if your approach is working?
- Have we got the right staff and the right development and reward arrangements?
- What is the school's approach to implementation of pay reform and performance related pay? If appropriate, is it compliant with the most up to date version of the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document?
- Is this a happy school with a positive learning culture? What is our track record on attendance, behaviour and bullying? Are safeguarding procedures securely in place? What are you doing to address any current issues, and how we will know if it is working?
- How good is our wider offer to pupils? Is the school offering a good range of sports, arts and voluntary activities? Is school food healthy and popular?
- Do we listen to what pupils and parents are telling us and do we give them sufficient opportunity to communicate with us?

### **Questions governors will be asked**

Do we:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- contribute to the school's self-evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses, including the impact of our own work
- support and strengthen school leadership, including by developing our own skills
- provide challenge and hold the Head Teacher and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety, including by using the data dashboard, other progress data, examination outcomes and test results
- use performance management systems, including the performance management of the Head Teacher, to improve teaching, leadership and management
- ensure solvency and probity and that the financial resources made available to the school are managed effectively
- operate in such a way that statutory duties are met and priorities are approved
- engage with key stakeholders

- use the pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics

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