

Being a Governor at The Willink School

The Willink School
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Being a governor at The Willink School is about being part of the community of the school. It is an important job requiring enthusiasm, time and commitment.

As a new governor, you will receive a pack of information from the Local Authority (LA), West Berkshire Council, which will describe the formal responsibilities and duties of being a governor. Our clerk will also provide you with some information. The list of documents you should expect to read is shown in Annex 1. Remember that the contents of these documents and materials do not need to be committed to memory. They are provided to form a useful reference resource, which can be used as the need arises.

This guide provides information about our governing body which we hope you will find helpful. A checklist to ensure your induction is complete is included as Annex 2.

You will quickly discover that there is more to being a governor than attending meetings, although it is true to say that meetings do provide the structure around which the governing body operates. Our aim is that you find the experience of being a governor at The Willink School fulfilling and enjoyable, despite there being a lot of work to do.

Getting to know the school and the governing body

Once you have become a governor you should contact the clerk to meet her. You may have already met with the head teacher and the chair of governors who will cover areas including the background to the school, current issues facing the school and the relationship between the head teacher and governing body. You should hopefully also have had a tour of the school during the day so that you have seen it 'in action' and have had an opportunity to meet staff and students. All these are important so that you experience the school and understand its ethos, so please contact the clerk to arrange these if needed.

The governing body consists of 20 governors including the head teacher. There are 2 parent governors, 1 staff governor, the head teacher, 1 governor appointed by West Berkshire Council and 15 co-opted governors. Co-opted governors are recruited on the skills and experiences they can bring to the governing body and can be parents, staff, and members of the wider community.

In addition to the chair and vice chairs some governors have specific individual responsibilities in a more specialist role, for example for health and safety, governor development or safeguarding children.

Attendance at meetings

The governing body (GB) meetings are where the GB makes the big decisions that affect The Willink School, its students, staff and families.

It is very important that all governors take part in this decision making. Please make every effort not to miss meetings. If missing a meeting is unavoidable, then you should send your apologies to the chair or clerk as soon as you can, however you would still be expected to contribute to the matters discussed by email, and ensure that you have completed your actions. Individual governors' attendance records are required to be published on the school's website.

Meetings usually take place at The Willink School on a Monday, normally at 5pm. It is important to be punctual. They usually last about two hours (sometimes two-and-a-half at full governing body meetings) and the dates are arranged well in advance. There are normally about 8 meetings per year for new governors, who sit on the full governing body and one committee.

Meetings are necessarily formal in the way they are conducted but the atmosphere is friendly. You can propose items for any agenda, through the clerk. Being a governor is more than just being at meetings. A good governor is proactive and will follow decisions through with action.

Governing body committees

Much of the work of the governing body takes place through its committees. We currently have four main committees which meet regularly once per (long) term and the Governor Development Forum is open to all governors to update governors on topical matters and to provide specified training:

- Resources (meets on a monthly basis)
- Sixth Form
- Curriculum and Data
- Students, Families and Community
- Governor Development Forum

In addition, a small committee meets to conduct the head teacher's appraisal and to perform a top-level review of the teaching staff appraisals. Further panels dealing with discipline and complaints may be needed, as and when required. Sometimes small working groups are also set up to work on specific projects, for example, an Ofsted Working Party.

Each department within the school has a link with a non-staff governor to discuss departmental progress over time. The 'link' governor will typically meet with the head of department twice a year and produce a report which is reviewed by the head teacher and chair of governors to agree any arising actions, and then shared with all governors.

Every governor should aim to either:

- serve on one committee, have a specialist role and be linked to a department; or
- serve on two committees and be linked to a department;

however, members of staff do not perform the 'link' or specialist roles, and new governors will typically start with fewer responsibilities whilst they build up their knowledge and experience. Some governors may take on more roles, through personal choice, if they have the time to dedicate to them.

You can propose items for any agenda, through the clerk to that committee, regardless of whether you are a member of that committee or not. Committees provide good opportunities for new governors to get involved right away, and because the group is small, it is easier to take part in all discussions.

Be prepared

You will be sent meeting papers at least seven days before the meeting. Meetings can only be effective if everyone has prepared well; this means reading the papers and making notes on any points you wish to make. Before your first meetings ask any basic questions or discuss any points of uncertainty with your mentor governor.

If you have any questions before a meeting, you can contact the head teacher, the chair of governors or committee chair (as appropriate) or the clerk – all will be happy to help.

The agenda for the full GB meetings is put together by the senior clerk in consultation with the head teacher and chair. If you would like to add something to the agenda, you should contact one of these individuals preferably two weeks before the meeting.

Once the agenda has been set only urgent or unforeseen items can usually be added under any other business.

Paperwork

Governors work almost exclusively electronically, with documentation stored on a secure area accessed via the school's website. Paper copies are not usually provided at meetings. Any paperwork or documents which you receive relating to the school should be treated as confidential, and kept and disposed of securely.

Communication

Email is a very effective way of distributing information; if you have any difficulties with receiving information by email, please notify the clerk. You have a duty to ensure that your email account/computer is secure as you will be sent confidential information. You will also be able to access the excellent on-line training offered by the NGA.

Respect confidentiality

It is important that governors share information. However, some things must be kept confidential. For example, discussions relating to specific students or staff are treated as confidential.

Sometimes the GB 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 chairs can act without consulting other members of the GB, but this is rare.

The GB 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 GB by consensus, but exceptionally the GB may take a vote to make a decision. We aim to discuss everything thoroughly and ensure that all points of view are listened to and considered.

Once a decision is made, all governors must support the decision.

Visiting the school

In order for governors to be truly effective, they need to visit regularly during the school day. Governors have no right of entry into a school, but at The Willink School, governors are always welcome to visit. It is however courteous to make an appointment in advance if you wish to see the head teacher, or another member of staff. As a new governor, you will be provided with a photo ID badge which should be worn whenever visiting the school. You will also need to sign a Governors' Attendance Register at Reception.

Governors are also asked to respect the workings of the school day, and be sensitive to demands upon the time of school staff. When visiting the school, governors must call at reception and sign in, not forgetting to sign out when they leave.

Governors are always encouraged to attend school events such as the open evenings, parent forums, school fairs and plays.

As well as informal visits, governors visit the school more formally in their monitoring role, in line with the Governors' School Visits Policy. Governors are also encouraged to attend a minimum of one of the three Governor Learning Walks arranged in an academic year. Such visits must:

- always be discussed with and agreed with the head teacher;
- always have a specific agreed purpose;
- never take the form of an inspection.

Governors must always respect the professionalism of the teaching staff. If any issues arise during the visit, they should be brought up afterwards with the head teacher during a debriefing meeting. It is not appropriate for governors to comment on the teacher's conduct of the lesson or on individual pupils.

Governors will need to report on their visit according to the Governors' School Visits Policy.

Which hat are you wearing?

Governors often have two roles in the school, as governor and as parent, employee or helper. If this is the case it is really important to try to keep these roles separate.

For example if you are a parent governor and wish to discuss a matter concerning your child it is helpful to let the teacher / head teacher know that you "have your parent hat on". If something has come to your attention however you feel that it has wider implications you may wish to discuss it "with your governor hat on".

Similarly, staff governors sometimes feel uncomfortable as governors, challenging decisions made by the head teacher who is their line manager.

If you are helping out in any other capacity in the school e.g. helping to run a school club, it is also important to keep your roles separate. Being a governor does not entitle you to any additional privileges or use of school resources.

These adjustments can take a bit of practice but most people manage it well.

Elected governors

Parent and staff governors (excluding the head teacher), are elected by other parents and staff respectively. It is important to remember that as such you do not represent the people who elected you in a parliamentary sense, but that you are representative of someone who has parental or staff experience.

As a governor you act as an individual.

The law

Many aspects of the way in which the GB is set up and runs are set down in law. A copy of The Governors' Handbook is available electronically on the Department for Education website. A copy of the Education Act, September 2013 is available at www.legislation.gov.uk.

Governors are expected to be familiar with the law.

Training

New governors are expected to attend both the Induction training provided by West Berkshire Council and the Safeguarding training provided either by the school or the council. You will be informed of the dates available.

The GB has determined mandatory and advisory training for all governors, which includes training specific to the committees that individual Governors are appointed to. You are expected to complete all the mandatory training as a minimum for all the roles that you fulfil.

You are required to develop your skills on an ongoing basis (to keep abreast of developments in school governance generally, to support any other responsibilities you take on, and to aid succession planning within the GB). The clerk, your mentor governor or the development governor will be able to help you. Records of training undertaken are kept on an individual's training record, which is updated periodically to reflect new courses/training modules introduced.

Role of your mentor

All new governors will be provided with a mentor from the experienced governors within the GB. Their task is to help you settle into your role swiftly, raise your confidence and ensure you become part of the team from the outset. Use their experience to help you understand the work of governors - and to answer any questions you are afraid to ask in public! They can discuss with you any of the topics in this note.

Your mentor will arrange an introductory session to get to know you and for you to air any concerns. Your mentor will also check progress against the checklist with you and should be able to answer any questions you have about how the Willink School addresses issues that you learn about during your training. Your mentor will also sign off the completion of your checklist shown in annex 2.

It would be normal for you to arrange to meet your mentor occasionally at a mutually convenient time and place and, after your first governing body meeting, to maintain your relationship.

Security clearance

All governors have to sign a declaration of qualification as a governor which covers aspects of criminal activity, bankruptcy and child protection. Furthermore, you will be asked to complete an application for clearances by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS). You need to be aware that refusal to complete the form if requested to do so, is automatic grounds for disqualification as a governor.

It is a simple paper-based procedure which should not be a cause of concern. If you require more details please speak to the head teacher or clerk.

Duration of your appointment, resignation and termination

Your appointment is for a minimum of four years and you are asked to commit to this period when you are appointed.

However, circumstances may arise that make it difficult for you to continue or to participate as fully as you or the GB may desire. Should the need to resign arise, the GB will expect at least 3 months' notice and completion of any outstanding actions assigned to you. This is especially important in relation to chairs of committees and your role as Link Governor, in which case a handover session will be required.

A governor may be removed from office if he/she fails to comply with The Willink School Governing Body Governors Code of Practice. The basis for removal and procedure are contained in this code which you will have been asked to sign upon your appointment.

Further information and support can be obtained from:

West Berkshire Council Governors' Helpdesk Tel: 01635 519047 / 519084

Email: governors@westberks.gov.uk

Website: www.westberks.gov.uk

Annex 1 - Information Sources

First Month

Upon appointment as a governor, you will receive two information packs from different sources.

The Willink School

New governors will receive the following from the clerk to the governors.

- “Being a governor at The Willink School” (copy of Induction Checklist for completion and return)
- The Willink School Governing Body Skills Audit (for completion and return asap)
- LA Declaration form (for completion and return)
- Business Interests form (for completion and return)
- Code of Practice form (for signing and return)
- Minutes of the last full governing body meeting.
- Details of the governing body committees including their terms of reference
- Dates for future governors’ meetings including committees
- Details of how to contact the other governors (list of contact details)
- Details of how to contact the school including the e-mail address
- The Governors’ School Visits Policy
- Weekly Staff Bulletin (via email)
- RM Unify login (VLE Login button on The Willink Home Page) (to access central electronic Willink governor information)
- Willink School email address
- National Governors’ Association membership (NGA) login (useful governor resource)
- Login details for Governorhub which has is kept updated with information and advice for Willink governors plus regular bulletins from West Berkshire Governors.

West Berkshire Council

New governors will receive the following from West Berkshire Council Governor Services.

- Welcome Pack
- Leaflet ‘New Governor – An Introduction’
- Yellow Governor’s Details Form (for completion and return asap)
- Your school’s Instrument of Government
- Communication system: Governor Services and Governing Bodies
- Latest copy of the Governor Professional Development Programme

West Berkshire Governor Services will book you onto the next available New Governor Induction course at either Pincents Manor or Shaw House.

First Three Months

Start to familiarise yourself with other sources of essential information.

The Willink School

New governors are recommended to read the following (via the school website). **Bold text represents essential reading.**

- Ethos and Values (Vision)
- School Prospectus
- 6th Form Prospectus
- Newsletters
- Letters
- Parent Forum and Information Evenings
- Calendar of School Events

- **The School Development Plan (SDP)**
- **The latest Ofsted inspection report on the school**
- DFE Performance Tables
- **Policy documents relevant to committee membership**
- Pupil Premium (4 documents)
- Parent View

Besides committee meetings, governors can get involved by attending the following.

- “Learning Walks”
- School events (plays, concerts, Parent Forums, Parent Information Evenings, etc)
- Presentations by staff (Governor-specific training) on school hot topics
- Re-admission meetings:
 - Must have completed GEL module on “Exclusions”
 - Read Behaviour Management Policy (school website and VLE)
 - Read Behaviour Management Policy exclusion procedures (school website and VLE)

Being a link governor (for a particular subject on the curriculum).

- Arrange to meet with Head of Department for the curriculum area assigned to make a governor visit
- Complete a Governor Visit Record

West Berkshire Council

New governors are also recommended to read/familiarise themselves with the WBC/For Governor and Clerks webpage.

- Latest News (Briefing notes to governors from NGA)
- Downloads
- Training and Development/Training and Development for Governors (calendar of training events)
 - Ofsted Expects
- NGA GEL (Governor E-Learning) - **New Governors will be sent information by the clerk regarding how to access on-line training**
- Some subject matters are only available via NGA GEL (you can download a course brochure)

Other Recommended Sites

DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) Governornet

DfE (Department for Education)

NGA (National Governor’s Association)

Ofsted

Annex 2 - New Governor Checklist:

Introductory activities:

Completed

Date

Welcomed to the governing body by the chair		
Invited by the head teacher to visit the school		
Toured the school and met staff and pupils		
Received an informal briefing on the school from the head		
Met informally with a nominated mentor (existing governor)		
Reviewed first FGB meeting with the mentor		

Complete and return documents provided by the Clerk of Governors

The Willink School Governing Body Skills Audit		
LA Declaration form		
Business interests form		
Preferred dates for safeguarding training		
Code of Practice		

Complete and return documents to West Berkshire

Yellow Governor's Details Form		
Request for New Governor Induction Training		

Read the following documents provided by the Clerk of Governors

School's "Being a Governor at The Willink School"		
Governors' Code of Practice		
Recommended training matrix		
The Governors pages from the RAISE report and the questions raised		

Weekly Staff Bulletin		
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Read the following documents provided by West Berkshire

Leaflet 'New Governor – An Introduction'		
Your school's Instrument of Government		
Communication system: Governor Services and Governing Bodies		

Head Teacher or Chair of Governors has covered:

Background to the school		
Current issues facing the school		
Visiting the school		
Relationship between the head teacher and governing body		

Have successfully logged in and accessed the following systems:

RM Unify login (VLE)		
NGA login		
Governorhub login		
NGA on-line training		

Read the following on the school's website:

Details of how to contact the school, including the school's email address		
Latest Ofsted report		

Accessed and read the following on the governors' portal via the school's website:

Minutes of last full governing body meeting		
Details of the governing body committees, including their Terms of Reference		
Dates for future governors' meetings including committees		
Details of how to contact the other governors (list of contact details)		
Governor Visits' Policy		
School Development Plan		
Policy documents relevant to committee membership		

Training completed:

Induction training for new Governors provided by West Berks		
Safeguarding training at West Berks or at The Willink School		
GEL modules:		
National Training Programme for new Governors		
Key functions of the Governing Body		

Ofsted Inspection of Schools		
Safeguarding – the Governor’s role		
Understanding school finance		
Governor visits to school		

Final sign off with mentor (target within 6 months of appointment)

	Governor	
(Print FULL name)		
Signature:		
Date:		

Please retain original signed copy for your own records and forward a copy to the Development Governor.