Being a Parent Governor

Parent governors are in a unique position on a governing body. Not only do parent governors have to work in the best interests of the school, but they have to balance this with their natural desire to see the best outcomes for their own child(ren) and there may be times when the decision made by the Governing Body does not affect your own child(ren) as you would have wished. The aim of this briefing paper is to offer advice to new parent governors on their specific role and suggest ways of handling some of the tricky situations which may arise.

As a parent governor it will sometimes feel that you have to know everything about the school, but can't talk about it; you have to be on everyone's side; if you don't do paid work, people imagine that you have loads of free time…..and you have to be able to juggle all these expectations. Remember that developing your role as a governor will take time.

✓ **Parent governors are:**	✕ **Parent governors are <u>not</u>:**
well placed to understand parents' views and to remind the governing body how matters being discussed affect parents;	in the role to focus on or press for changes specific only to their child(ren);
individuals! How you vote on any decision is up to you;	expected to gather the views of other parents and take them to the governing body;
in a good position to help the governing body to communicate effectively with parents;	simply expected to represent the views of the parents;
equal in status to all other governors.	a link between parents and the governing body;
	expected to vote as instructed by other parents.

What are the good bits about being a parent governor?

* You have a very privileged and responsible role.
* You have the opportunity to make a difference, not only for your children, but for children in years to come.
* You have the opportunity to make a difference for other parents, and to help influence the way in which school works with them.
* You will learn a lot and develop new skills.

How to fulfil your role

* Attend all governing body meetings – both full governors and sub-committees – be prepared by reading documents in advance and play an active role in discussion and decision-making.
* Learn all you can about the school. Attend events such as assemblies.
* Consider how the governing body communicate with parents? Could you help them to improve links?
* How accessible is the school – how easy is it for parents to go into school to discuss things with the headteacher or teachers? Could you give feedback to help the school to be more open and welcoming?
* How accessible are the governors – do parents ever get the opportunity to meet with governors; do they know how to get in touch with the chair of governors if they need to?
* Learn how the school handles complaints and read the complaints policy. If another parent approaches you with a complaint, advise them to speak to the headteacher, do not enter into discussion as this may prejudice the handling and outcome.
* Be approachable to other parents, but make sure you are clear about your role.
* Always represent the school positively.
* As a governor you are one of a group and must never act alone.
* Always support the decisions of the full governing body. Have your say on decisions in meetings and vote in the way you wish; but then support the outcomes of votes – even if you disagreed with them.
* **Always, always, always observe confidentiality**. You will get to know a lot of highly sensitive and confidential information and will see the school in action during visits – don't discuss what you know and see with anyone who is not a governor. Sometimes discussions and decisions can, in time, be shared with parents and those outside the governing body but in many cases they remain confidential ad infinitum. Remember, a governor can be suspended for breaches of confidentiality.

How you can help individual parents

From time to time you may be approached by other parents asking for help, or wanting to make a complaint about something the school is, or isn't doing.

* Make it clear you can't act for the governing body.
* Don't raise expectations that you can "have a word" or that the school will "put it right" – there may be underlying issues or background that you don't know about.
* Keep an open mind – there are at least two sides to every story!
* You may need to explain why the governing body has made a decision in a certain way, so be prepared.

What to do if you experience a conflict between being a parent and being a governor

This can happen – especially if you think the governing body is making decisions which you feel will adversely affect your child(ren).

* If a difficulty arises, take a step back and think things through as objectively as you can.
* If you are concerned, talk to the headteacher or to the chair of governors.
* Make sure you don't break confidentiality when discussing your concerns outside governing body meetings.

Where to get help, advice and support

* Attend the induction training offered by Northumberland County Council. Sessions run during the day and in the evenings. You'll meet other new governors and will find lots of people who feel just the same as you.
* From other governors.
* From the headteacher.
* From the chair of governors allison.wort@school360.co.uk
* From the clerk to the governing body – Susan Mitchell (our School Support Officer) on 01670 623610 susan.mitchell01@northumberland.gov.uk
* Look at https://northumberlandeducation.co.uk/
* Ask for a governor mentor or "buddy" to help you through the first few months.

And finally…..

* Don't be discouraged if at first everything seems confusing and difficult to get to grips with. Most new governors feel this way.
* Don't feel you have to know everything straight away…..it can take a full year to begin to see how the cycle of governing body business fits together.

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