

Top Tips – Parent and Staff Elections

It is important that schools and academies make every effort to fill staff governor vacancies to ensure the continuity of the governing board. Holding vacancies open without a recruitment plan is not good governance.

The first thing to remember when running parent or staff governor elections is that it is not the role of the governors (or trustees if applicable to run the election) as this is the role and responsibility of the headteacher. However there are a number of top tips that may be useful for governors and trustees to check in about...this is not an exhaustive list.

In accordance with Section 15 of the Education Act 1986, parent governors must be elected by secret ballot. The Local Authority has delegated the role of the returning officer to headteachers. Headteachers are recommended not to wait until the term of office of the existing parent governor comes to an end before starting the election process¹.

Once a parent or staff governor's term of office comes to an end, nominations must be sought.

Be Clear and Transparent

- Have the eligibility criteria, role expectations, and term of office been shared in advance of the election?
- Has information about the role of a governor so candidates and voters understand what they're voting for been provided?

Keep the Process Fair and Consistent

- Use the same process each time (unless the scheme of delegation or articles have changed)
- Ensure nomination forms and ballot papers are standardised and accessible.
- Ensure everyone with parental responsibility has a vote
- Ensure that all staff are encouraged to participate in the election.
- Remember in a maintained school a parent is not eligible if they work in the school for more than 500 hours per year. Many academy trusts use the same principle. Always check
- A Parent Governor cannot be appointed at a committee meeting or by the chair using emergency powers in between termly meetings.

Communicate Well

- Give parents/staff plenty of notice about the election timeline and be specific as to the closing date (i.e. the time and date the election closes) and that late papers will not be accepted.
- Use multiple channels (email, letters home, website, staff briefing) to reach everyone.
- Be clear about the election process itself.

Encourage a Broad Range of Candidates

- Make it clear that no specialist knowledge is required—just commitment and willingness to learn.

¹ [Electing a Parent Governor Aug 21.pdf](#)

- Consider running an information session or FAQ sheet about what being a governor involves and does not involve.

Ensure Accessibility

- Have ballot papers been made available in different formats if needed (digital and paper, translations where appropriate)?
- Ensure that there is a simple process for returning votes confidentially.

Follow Governance Guidance

Governors and trustees need to make sure that schools follow their trust's articles, scheme of delegation if appropriate, any latest DfE/NGA guidance on elections, and the maintained school governance regulations available at [The School Governance \(Constitution\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)

Make sure school leaders keep proper records of nominations, votes, and outcomes in case of a challenge.

In the event of insufficient parents standing for election the governing body **may** appoint to the vacancy. The appointment of a parent governor must be made at a meeting of the full governing body and should appear as an agenda item. All governors are entitled to vote. The appointment must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.

Things Not To Do

Don't Treat It as a Popularity Contest

Ensure to remind everyone that the election is not a popularity contest and try to encourage candidates not to campaign; instead stick to short candidate statements (usually 200–250 words) and share these at the same time that the ballot papers are shared.

Don't Exclude or Discourage Candidates Unfairly

- Only exclude someone if they are disqualified under statutory regulations.
- Don't filter candidates based on perceived "skills gaps" at this stage—the board can co-opt if specific expertise is needed
- Don't Rush the Process as rushed election leads to mistakes, low engagement, and possible disputes
- Candidate details should be handled carefully. Do not circulate personal data beyond what's needed (e.g., candidate statements).
- If turnout is poor, reflect on how communication and accessibility could be improved next time.

Don't Forget Induction

- Remind the winning candidate that winning the election is just the start. Make sure new governors get an induction, safeguarding training, and mentoring.

Step-by-Step Election Process (main elements)

1. Check you have a vacancy

- Your clerk should be able to confirm this against the Instrument of Government or the Articles/Scheme of Delegation. You can elect early if you know you are going to have a definite vacancy; that way the successful person can observe some meetings before they start.

2. Notify all eligible parents/staff of the vacancy, the role, and the timetable.

Include the following information;

- What governors do
- Term of office (usually but not always 4 years)
- Eligibility and disqualification criteria
- Deadline for nominations

3. Open the Nomination Process

- Provide a nomination form (name, contact details, declaration of eligibility, short statement of suitability – usually 200–250 words)
- Allow at least 10 working days for nominations

4. Check Nominations

- Verify eligibility against statutory disqualification rules
- If nominations equal the number of vacancies the candidate(s) are automatically appointed (no election needed). This is why it is important to be clear at the outset what the roles and responsibilities involve

5. Prepare Ballot (if needed)

- Decide whether the ballot will be paper, electronic, or both
- Share candidate statements with all eligible voters
- Ensure it is secret, fair, and accessible

6. Run the Election

- Allow at least 5–10 working days for voting
- Make clear: one vote per parent/eligible staff member
- Provide secure collection/return arrangements (e.g., sealed ballot box, unique online link)

7. Count Votes

- Do this transparently, ideally with two people present. This should include a governor if possible
- If tied draw lots, unless your scheme or procedures sets a different tie-breaker. Follow the process at all times

8. Announce the Result

- Notify all parents/staff of the outcome
- Record the result in governance records and action accordingly (website, GIAS, Companies House if a Trustee)

9. Appoint & Induct

- Clerk formally confirms appointment with the Trust Board.

- Provide induction pack, safeguarding training, and mentoring.

Main Disqualification Criteria for categories of parent and staff governor (maintained schools)

A person is disqualified from election or appointment as a **parent governor** of a school if the person

(a) is an elected member of the local authority; or

(b) is paid to work at the school for more than 500 hours in any twelve consecutive months

A person is disqualified from holding or from continuing to hold office as a governor of a school at any time when the person is a registered pupil at the school.

No person may at any time hold the office of more than one governor of the same school.

Upon ceasing to work at the school, a staff governor of a school is disqualified from continuing to hold office as such a governor.

All appointments are subject to DBS and s128 checks (depending on setting).

Many academy trusts follow the maintained schools guidance.

Useful sources of information

1. Your clerk or Governance Professional; or governance service provider
2. The Local Authority Governor Services team (where available) maintained school
3. The Scheme of Delegation and Articles of Association in an academy trust
4. [The School Governance \(Constitution\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#) – maintained schools
5. [Parent governor/trustee elections | GovernorHub](#) (subscription site)
6. [Electing parent governors and trustees | National Governance Association](#)
7. [Electing a Staff Governor - Process Aug 21.pdf](#)

Summary

This briefing note does not contain all the guidance you need and should be followed with caution. When in doubt check with the LA, trust or governance lead.



SBW Governance