

Welcome to the Chair of Governors Role



**A Guide for Newly Elected Chairs of Governors
in Local Authority Maintained Schools**

**Your part in achieving the highest standards, as
good as the best, for all Suffolk children and young
people today and for their futures.**

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Dear Chair of Governors,

Congratulations on taking up the position of Chair of Governors and thank you for your commitment to making a positive impact on the education and lives of children and young people; so that all pupils receive an education that is as good as the best.

As leader of the governing board, you will play a large part in determining the culture of the board and ensure it retains a strategic focus and fulfils each of its core functions as recognised by the National Governance Association (NGA):

- Developing a vision and strategy for the school
- Overseeing the financial performance of the school and making sure its money is well spent
- Holding the school leader to account to ensure that every pupil has the best possible education
- Engaging with pupils, staff, parents and the school community to understand their views of the school.

We recognise that you will develop your own leadership style as Chair based on what's most effective for you, your governing board, and your school. This document is designed to provide you with an overview of the role. It does not replace the National Governance Association's (NGA) Chair's Handbook, which we would strongly encourage you to purchase if you have not already done so, or other available training and resources.

We wish you all the best in your new role as Chair of Governors. If you have any queries or would like support with governance, please contact the Local Authority Governor Services Team at governance@suffolk.gov.uk or at 01473 265987 or 01473260163 or speak with your school's Standards and Excellence Partner (SEP).

Yours Sincerely,

Governor Services Team

Standards and Excellence Team
Education, Skills and Learning
Directorate of Children and Young People
Suffolk County Council

WellbeingEqualityAchieveSupportPrideInnovateRespectEmpower

The 8 Elements of Effective Governance

The National Governance Association list 8 elements essential to good governance, including good chairing. Arguably good chairing is the most important of the 8 elements as the Chair of Governors has a responsibility, supported by other members of the governing board, to ensure all of the remaining elements of effective governance are in place. These are:

- The right people around the table
- Understanding the role and responsibilities
- Professional clerking
- Good relationships based on trust
- Knowing the school – the data, the staff, the parents, the children, the community
- Commitment to asking challenging questions
- Confidence to have courageous conversations in the interests of the children and young people.

The Chair's Role in School Improvement

School improvement is the core role of the governing board and the Chair of Governors should ensure that the governing board defines the vision, ethos and strategic direction of the school. Once a strategy is in place, usually in the form of a School Development Plan, the Headteacher manages the plan's implementation with staff members. It is the role of the governing board to monitor the impact of the implementation and whether the school is on course to meet these goals. The Chair must ensure that the governing board remains strategic rather than operational.

Chair and Headteacher Relationship

It is expected that the Chair of Governors both supports and challenges the Headteacher to make sure leadership and management is strong, as well as strengthening governance by ensuring the board is provided with the information it needs to make strategic decisions and ask challenging questions. The professional relationship between the Chair and Headteacher should be based on trust and mutual respect. It is common for the Chair of Governors to speak with the Headteacher more frequently than other members of the board but they should be mindful of their position as leader of the governing board, not of the school, and not stray into operational matters. The Chair also has a responsibility for Headteacher wellbeing and workload. As a new Chair, you will likely find it useful to create or renew your [Headteacher and Chair of Governors Agreement](#). This version provided suggests the basic areas you may want to consider but do feel free to make it your own.

Specific Chair Responsibilities

- **Chair's Action:** The Chair of Governors is the leader of the governing board but has no defined individual power and therefore cannot be held solely accountable for any decisions the board may make. The power and authority rests with the governing board as a whole. The Chair may however act under Chair's action between meetings, but only when it is not possible to call a governing board or committee meeting before a decision has to be made or where not to act would be seriously detrimental to the interests of the school, the pupils, their parents or anyone employed at the school. Any decision made under Chair's action must be reported to the governing board as soon as possible.
- **Chair's Vote:** In the event of a tied vote the Chair may vote again with a casting vote. The Chair must think carefully before using a casting vote as it may be better for a decision to be reached another way, for example at a later meeting with additional information.
- **Point of Contact:** Means of contacting the Chair should be published on the school website and the Chair may therefore receive correspondence that requires some degree of response outside of meetings, however no decisions should be made solely by the Chair unless under Chair's action. The contact address provided should not be the personal address of the Chair and is often by care of the school office.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

The NGA note that a successful governing board is generative as well as strategic and uses thinking and discussion to generate ideas. As leader of the governing board it's the Chair's responsibility to nurture a culture that provides opportunity for diversity of thought and acts as an advocate for vulnerable pupils. As Chair you may want to consider how diverse your board is and take this into account when succession planning and recruiting new members. Further information on this is available in our Recruitment Toolkit.

Time Commitment & Task Delegation

The time a Chair spends on the role will depend on the situation of the school and the preferred chairing style of the individual. Tasks should not be assumed to belong to the Chair and effective delegation is important, both to reduce pressure on the Chair and contribute to the development of the rest of the board. Chairs should encourage those with relevant skills to chair committees or lead on certain pieces of work, as well as ensuring all governors receive relevant training. It is not sustainable for the Chair to take on an excessive amount of work themselves which could instead be delegated to other members of the board. If the chair's role is too much for any one individual member of the board to maintain, a Co-Chair can be elected.

Training

- **[Development for Chairs of Maintained Schools](#)** – This NGA Leading Governance leadership development programme provides Chairs, Vice-Chairs, committee Chairs and future Chairs opportunities for developing leadership skills and confident governance.
- **[Schools' Choice – Being an Effective Chair and Leader of Governance](#)** – This session is designed to support current and aspiring Chairs to reflect on the skills and knowledge required to be an effective Chair and leader of governance. It considers the important role the Chair plays in leading and modelling effective governance to make the most of the experience, knowledge, and skills of all board members. It also examines the vital role of the Chair in leading and building the team and supporting and challenging the Headteacher and senior leadership team. The session includes tips on how to make your meetings as effective as possible.

Chair's First Steps

Your first weeks as Chair of Governors will be unique to you and the context of your role in your school. However, some activities you may like to carry out at the beginning of the role include:

- Meet with the Headteacher and complete a Head/Chair agreement
- Meet with the clerk
- If possible, meet with the outgoing Chair of Governors
- Meet with the Vice-Chair
- Reflect on your own understanding of your school, its challenges and priorities
- Make arrangements to access Chair of Governors training
- Consider whether the board is currently structured and acting in the best way suited to ensure strategic direction and improve school performance.

Succession Planning

The NGA recommends that no individual serves as Chair of Governors for a period of more than 6 consecutive years in any one school. The governing board should also decide on the length of time between Chair elections, with the recommendation being that this period should not exceed 1 year.

Succession planning for the Chair of Governors, as with the Vice-Chair and other members of the board, should be ongoing and not only occur if the Chair decides to step down. Should the Chair need to step down before the election of a new Chair, the Vice-Chair automatically fills the role until an election takes place.

Whilst it is common for the Vice-Chair to then be formally elected as Chair, it shouldn't be assumed that they will want to be, or that no other member of the board won't also be interested in the position.

Delegation of tasks and development of the skills of the board is important to ensuring knowledge is spread across the board as a whole and doesn't lie with the Chair or any other individual member.

Resources

- **[The National Governance Association's Chairs Handbook](#)** A comprehensive induction guide about the responsibilities and work of the Chair of Governors. Also useful for Vice-Chairs and Chairs of committees.
- **[The National Governance Association](#)** the National Governance Association is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England. They are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aim to improve the education standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards. They have a variety of membership packages available. Please visit their website for further information and pricing.
- **[The Key for School Governors](#)** A national information service that provides guidance, insight and answers to questions on all aspects of school governance, as well as examples of documents and downloadable templates. Visit their website for further information and pricing.
- **[Governors for Schools](#)** A free recruitment service for governing boards. Governors for schools also run webinars and provide free e-learning.
- **[Inspiring Governance](#)** A free governor recruitment service.
- **[Maintained Schools Governance Guide](#)** Guidance on the roles and duties of governing boards, and advice of the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to be effective.
- **[Constitution of Governing Bodies of Maintained Schools](#)** Statutory guidance setting out the arrangements for the constitution of governing bodies of all LA maintained schools.
- **[Standards and Excellence Partner \(SEP\) Visits](#)** The SEP for your school will visit at least once half-term. It's strongly recommended that governors attend these visits to gain a verified external view of the school. Evaluations made during SEP visits are compiled in a Rolling Record and uploaded to the Perspective Lite website. Your Headteacher will be able to provide governors with access to this.
- **[Governor Network Sessions](#)** Regular sessions run by the Regional Lead of Education for your school, giving Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Governors the opportunity to meet and share thoughts, ideas and examples of best practice. 8

Useful Contacts

The Governor Services Team, Suffolk County Council
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Regional Leads for Education (RLE)
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If you are unsure who your school's Regional Lead is, please ask us at
governance@suffolk.gov.uk

Schools' Choice

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