

FAQs

What qualifications do governors need?

No particular qualifications or experience are needed. The most important quality for any governor is a commitment to the welfare and achievement of the children and the school. Governors serve their community and work for the good of their school. They are not expected to be expert educationalists, but are expected to attend relevant training and briefing sessions in order to understand and carry out their responsibilities effectively. Many of the functions of governing body are statutory, or have a legal framework: for example, their power to appoint and dismiss staff; and are accountable for large sums of public money. It is clearly important that these duties are carried out correctly and effectively.

Are governors vetted by the DBS (Disclosure & Barring Service, formally Criminal Records Bureau) before appointment?

All Islington governors are required to submit a Self-Declaration form before appointment and to agree to a full check (enhanced disclosure) which also includes proof of identity. These checks are confidential. The legislation in this area is changing and governors will be kept advised of developments. All governors are required to provide relevant information (date of birth etc.) on their initial application form. References are also required.

Do governors get paid?

No. They are however the largest volunteer workforce in the country. Most governing bodies have a policy under which all governors are entitled to claim out of pocket expenses involved in travelling, childcare etc., so no-one should feel excluded from coming forward as a governor on financial grounds. Governor training and other governor related expenditure is a cost to the schools budget.

I am not a parent of a school-aged child; can I still be a school governor?

Yes, you could be considered for co-option as a community governor, or appointment as a Local Authority (LA) governor. A first step could be to contact Islington Council Governor Services or to contact a local school. Most adults of 18 and over are eligible to become governors.

Realistically, how much time would be needed to do the work of a governor effectively?

The time commitment is not usually excessive, though the responsibilities are considerable. The list below suggests a likely workload:

- A minimum of 3 full governing body meetings a year
- 1 meeting per term for each committee (most governors are on at least one e.g. finance, premises, curriculum, personnel)
- Visits to school during the day to understand and learn more about the work of the school by arrangement with the headteacher at least once a term (*Governors do not act as inspectors!*)
- Possible involvement in casework with pupils and staff (if member of relevant committee)

- Recommended attendance at at least one training session per year, and during the first year, at the DFE National Induction course which is formally accredited. In addition there are 3 Islington Governors' Briefing Sessions per year.
- And of course each school will have a range of social or formal events which their governors are invited to attend to learn about the school and show their support.

Do nursery schools have governors?

Yes, they have governing bodies just like other schools.

What about time off work to be a governor?

Most meetings are during the evenings. The Guide to the Law says that an employer must give an employee "reasonable" time off work for governor business, which is regarded as public service, but pay is at the employer's discretion. Many employers actively encourage their people to become governors, since it provides new experience and skills which are useful in many jobs.

Can a governor take complaints from parents to the governing body?

Governors, especially parent governors, are sometimes approached by parents who have a grievance or complaint against the school. In the first instance, any complaint should be referred to the Headteacher. Individual cases should not be taken to the whole governing body. Schools should have a recognised complaints procedure, and governors should encourage parents to follow it. However, on occasions it may be appropriate for a governor to have a word with the headteacher or Chair, over an issue. If a number of parents are complaining about the same issue, there may be an issue over policy or procedures which the governing body rightly needs to address. Advice on such issues is always available from the governor support service (see below).

Could governors find themselves liable for any financial commitments if the school runs out of money and what about being sued by parents or staff?

School governance is corporate, which broadly means that no governor, acting in goodwill, would be deemed to be personally liable for any outcome, or carry individual financial responsibility. Any debt the school may run up would be discussed with the LA and would probably have to be repaid from the next year's budget. If however an individual governor acts fraudulently, s/he is liable to the normal processes of law. In the case of any claims for negligence, governing bodies are covered by corporate insurance cover arranged by the school or LA.

Should governors get involved as volunteers in the classroom?

They are not expected to, but a few may be able to do this, by arrangement with the school. It is in no way a requirement or even an unspoken expectation. Any volunteer working with children would be required to undergo the same safety/clearance checks.

What training and support is available?

Islington Council provides a comprehensive training programme, which includes evening, daytime and online training, and church schools governors may also access training organised by the relevant diocesan authorities. All new governors are given an induction pack, and Islington Council Governor Services offers telephone support, and regular updates and reports usually sent via the Chair of Governors. Each governing body is serviced by a clerk, who may be approached with any questions. In addition, there are national governors' organisations which offer literature, advice and other resources; on websites such as the Department for Education and 'GovernorNet'. All governors are

entitled to access for free, any training required to support them in their role. Training and any other governing body costs are funded from the school's delegated budget in the same way as any other school expenditure.

I would like to become a school governor. What should I do?

Contact Islington Council Governor Services by e-mailing amber.fitch@islington.gov.uk or by phoning 020 7527 5897, and request information about becoming a school governor. If however, you have a child at school, you could enquire at the school about the possibility of standing for election as a parent governor.

Adapted from the internet and Guide to the Law specifically for Islington governors