

The Archdiocese of Cardiff



A Code of Conduct for School Governors

Introduction

The purpose of this *Code of Conduct* is to enable the governing body to contribute to the school securing its mission and sustaining its ethos as a Catholic school, as well as ensuring the school provides a quality educational experience for all its children and achieves high standards.

Legal Framework

The governing body is a corporate body. Governors have no authority to act individually except where the governing body has delegated authority to do so. All governors have equal status, and although governors are appointed and elected by different groups, the central concern must be the welfare of our school as a Catholic school, conducted in accordance with the Diocesan Trust Deed.

Roles and Responsibilities

The governing body is responsible for:

- Promoting high standards of educational achievement, whilst ensuring the school meets statutory requirements.
- Securing the Catholic ethos, thus ensuring the school is seen to bear witness to the faith in all aspects of its work.

The governing body has a strategic role. As an agent of accountability, fulfilling an important ministry in the mission of the Church on behalf of the Catholic community and the community of the school, the governing body decides what it wants the school to achieve, in order to secure its mission, and sets the framework for making sure those intentions are realised.

This means:

- Working at all times with the appropriate diocesan officers to ensure the school is fulfilling its mandate in canon and legislative law.
- Ensuring the vision, mission, ethos and strategic direction of the school are clearly defined by setting the aims and objectives of the school.
- Adopting policies, agreeing targets and determining priorities to achieve the aims and objectives.
- Ensuring there are plans and procedures in place to secure those policies, targets and priorities.
- Ensuring that the headteacher performs his or her responsibilities for the educational performance of the school.
- Reviewing the aims and objectives, and monitoring and evaluating progress in implementing the policies, achieving the targets and addressing priorities.
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the work of the school in providing a high quality education rooted in life, person and teachings of Jesus Christ and Gospel values.

- Ensuring the sound, proper and effective use of the school's financial resources.

Accountability

In its strategic role, the governing body is accountable to:

- The Trustees who own the school, for the school's effectiveness as a Catholic school.
- The Local Authority which maintains the provision, for the school's effectiveness in providing a broad, balanced, relevant education that meets the needs of the children in the school.
- The Catholic community, and the wider community, who entrust their children to the school for the outcomes achieved by their children, in all aspects of their being.

The headteacher is responsible for:

- Acting as professional adviser to the governing body, obliged by law to provide the information governors need to carry their legal duties.
- Advising on and implementing the strategic framework agreed by the governing body, which includes:
 - Formulating and drafting aims and objectives, policies and targets for consideration by the governing body.
 - Implementing policies set by the governing body.
 - Leading the school towards agreed targets.
 - Reporting on progress towards the agreed aims, objectives and targets.
 - Discharging delegated responsibilities on the governing body's behalf.
- The internal organisation, management and control of the school, including the implementation of the curriculum and the day to day running of the school.
- The educational performance of the school.

Commitment

It is recognised that being a governor:

- Involves committing significant amounts of time and energy.
- Involves participating in mandatory training and other training opportunities as required.
- Involves participating fully in the work of the governing body so that individuals accept a fair share of the responsibilities and duties, including service on committees, working parties or as 'named governors'.
- Requires regular attendance at meetings of the full governing body and committees.
- Requires getting to know the school well and responding to opportunities to visit and get involved in school activities.

- Requires considering seriously our individual and collective training and development needs and using any designated funds to address them.
- Requires knowledge and understanding of their role within school procedures.

Confidentiality

Being a governor requires that governors:

- Observe strict **confidentiality** routinely as a matter of course, particularly, for example regarding matters concerning staff, children or their parents/carers.
- Keep discussion about decisions strictly **confidential** even when decisions themselves are made public through the minutes of meetings.
- Exercise prudence when invited to respond in discussions and informal talk outside governing body meetings, and instead of passing individual comment, encourage issues to be brought to the attention of the headteacher or governing body (depending on the nature of the issue) through the proper channels.
- Exercise care that any discussions do not prejudice any formal procedures.

Confidentiality and Child Protection

It is essential to Governors', and the school's, reputation and credibility that the rule of confidentiality is not broken, ***unless it is about a child protection issue***:

'The only circumstances when a breach of confidentiality is justified arises when a governor of a school receives information in confidence outside a meeting, which suggests that a pupil is at risk of physical, sexual or other abuse of some kind. Child protection matters cannot be kept confidential and must be reported to the statutory authority i.e. the police or social services . . . if a problem of this kind arises, . . . seek the advice of your chairperson or headteacher as soon as possible before breaching the confidence.
(*A Handbook for Governors of Schools in Wales*)

Relationships

Drawing on the model of the person, life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the governing body strives to develop effective working relationships with:

- The headteacher
- Staff
- Children
- Parents
- The Archdiocese
- The Local Authority
- Multi-agency representatives
- Parishes and local communities
- Other local schools, including Catholic schools
- Local educational organisations/businesses etc.

In forming, building and sustaining good working relationships governors strive to:

- Remember that governors are typically representative of the *category* of governor out of which they are appointed or elected. Governors are not representatives **of** those *groups*, e.g. a parent governor expresses their views using their experience as a parent; they are not representing the views of the whole parent body of the school.
- Work as members of a team in which constructive working relationships are actively promoted to help ensure the governing body functions with corporate responsibility and accountability.
- Develop an open and honest relationship with the headteacher and all school staff, acting as ‘critical friend’ to the school, ensuring a balance is struck between offering challenge and support.
- Ensure that effective relationships are built on trust and opportunities to network effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure that Gospel values underpin the relationships between governors and with other stakeholders. The governing body should draw on the guidance offered in the Bishops’ Conference 2012 document *Christ at the Centre* that whilst not definitive, the core values based on the Beatitudes may be summarised as follows:
 - Faithfulness and integrity
 - Dignity and compassion
 - Humility and gentleness
 - Truth and justice
 - Forgiveness and mercy
 - Purity and holiness
 - Tolerance and peace
 - Service and sacrifice

Conduct of Governors

Governors have a duty to act with integrity, objectivity and honesty in the best interests of the school at all times. Reflecting the model provided in the person, life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the governing body strives to behave professionally at all times.

- Governors should aim to discharge their duties in a manner that maintains and develops the Catholic ethos of the school and its reputation in the parish, local community and wider educational community. Governors’ actions at all times should reflect the responsibility to secure the Catholic ethos of the school.
- Governors should consider at all times, how to exercise stewardship, both as individuals and as a corporate body, which should manifest and be faithful to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Catholic Church, and Gospel values.

- Governors should reflect on how governors are perceived by stakeholders in all that is said and done, both as individual governors and as a corporate body.
- Governors should consider carefully how decisions and actions might affect others, whether they are individuals employed by the school; children or adults who are part of the school community; the parish; other schools in the locality; or the wider community.
- Governors should express views openly at meetings, but accept collective responsibility for all decisions made by the governing body or any individual governor delegated to do so.
- Governors must not speak out against majority decisions in public or in private outside the governing body. The intention is to protect the reputation and authority of the governing body and the school in the public domain.
- Governors, through their minutes, must be open about the decisions they make and the actions they take and in particular be prepared to explain their actions and decisions to interested parties.
- Governors must only speak or act on behalf of the governing body when specifically authorised to do so.
- Governors must respond to criticism or complaints about the school and / or its staff by referring to the school's Complaints Procedure adopted by the governing body for the correct procedure to be followed, and will advise the complainant accordingly.
- Governors must record in the register of pecuniary interests any pecuniary interest governors might have in connection with the governing body's business.
- Governors must declare an interest in any item of business and withdraw from the meeting while it is under discussion.
- Governors must always undertake visits within the framework established by the governing body and agreed with the headteacher.

Meeting Structure and Management

(For more information on the structure of the Governing body, refer to the *Archdiocesan Policy and Guidance on Governing Body Committees and Terms of Reference*)

By working through an effective and efficient committee structure the governing body should strive to keep the number of full governing body meetings to the legal minimum of three per academic year, which in normal circumstances are one a term.

An annual meeting plan (for governing body and committee meetings) which identifies all planned meetings; dates and times; expected items in line with the annual cycle of business (e.g. policy review, results, budget setting) should be published in advance of the start of each academic year. Thought should be given to the timing of meetings, including holding them during the working day or at the end

of the school day, rather than the evening. Where possible committee meetings may be held back to back to facilitate attendance at two committees in one evening, with a rotation of timings to ensure each committee takes turns at having an earlier start.

Whilst aiming for a tight regular meeting structure the governing body retains the flexibility to hold additional full governing body meetings in special circumstances (for example, to begin the appointment of a headteacher, Ofsted/Estyn, etc.). Ad hoc committees which deal with specific procedural issues will only meet when necessary, in a manner determined by the governing body.

The chair of governors, chairs of committees, the headteacher, all other governors and the clerk should subscribe to the following expectations so that the governing body, whether working corporately or in committee, achieves informed, collective decisions in an effective and efficient manner that meet the requirements of Regulations and of the Church:

- All Governing Body meetings and deliberations should begin with prayer, asking God our Father, with Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, to open hearts and minds to His presence and grace, so that discussions and decisions are in accord with His will.
- The headteacher agrees which committee meetings it is appropriate for him/her to attend and whether or not the deputy headteacher or another senior leader can take responsibility for support some committee meetings. This has the advantage of contributing to the professional development of other leaders within the school.
- The chair (in the governing body and in committee meetings) must manage the meeting to keep discussion focused; matters in proportion; and, draw on all members' contributions.
- In advance of full governing body meetings the chair and headteacher should discuss and agree the agenda before it is published by the clerk, giving 7 days' notice of the meeting.
- All agenda items should be submitted through the clerk to the meeting and the agenda should be clear and purposeful.
- In order to be effective, meetings need to be quorate. The quorum for a governing body meeting is 50% of the membership (not including vacant positions).
- Apologies are considered at full governing body meetings and not simply accepted.
- All meetings should have a maximum length of 2 hours.
- Governors are expected to be punctual and meetings should start at the agreed time.
- All governors must properly prepare for meetings by reading papers in advance and giving thought to the issues to be discussed. All papers circulated in advance of the meeting should be taken as read.

- Governors may consider a '15 minute' limit for discussion of each agenda item, unless the governing body or committee agree otherwise for a specific agenda item.
- Where any governor is unavoidably late, agenda items should not be re-run.
- 'Any Other Business' should be limited to genuinely urgent matters that need to be addressed by the members of the group.
- Governors are expected to make relevant and purposeful contributions; understand how to challenge others in a constructive way; listen to others; and accept collective responsibility, even in relation to decisions individuals do not personally agree with.
- Decisions are taken by vote on a simple majority.
- The decision of the governing body to allow alternative arrangements for governors/committee members to participate or vote at meetings remotely by telephone, conferencing or other prescribed methods must be strictly adhered to.
- In full governing body meetings there is usually no repeat of a debate already had by committees. Committees are usually trusted to carry out their responsibilities and report decisions to full governing body meetings.
- Minutes should record key matters discussed; summarise the key points discussed; record decisions and / or agreed actions accurately. The detail of the discussion and how governors vote is confidential. The minutes should be made available, in draft form, within 7 days of the meeting, thus ensuring they are proof-read with a good recollection of the meeting. Confidential matters should not be recorded in minutes that are published in the public domain.
- Minutes should be reviewed, amended as necessary and signed by the chair at the next meeting.

Visiting the School

School visits are an essential part of the governors' role. Effective and well organised visits can provide the governing body with a strategy for monitoring the effectiveness of school policies.

Before the visit governors should:

- Clarify the purpose.
- Discuss and agree the agenda with the headteacher well in advance; be clear what is being observed/discussed.
- Make sure that the date is suitable for the purpose identified.
- Receive and discuss with the headteacher any supporting information, e.g. Estyn/Ofsted report, SEF, School Improvement Plan, performance data, relevant lesson plans.
- If it is a visit to a class, discuss with the class teacher integration into the lesson.

During the visit governors should:

- Be aware of the timetable for the visit and aim to adhere to it, but be flexible.
- If it is a visit to a class, decide with the teacher how they will be introduced and their role in the classroom.
- Be sensitive to the fact that the teacher is there to teach, so talk to the teacher when it is appropriate.
- Remain focused on the purpose of the visit in conversation with the teacher.
- Be discreet in your note taking, it can be disconcerting.
- Be courteous and polite, not critical.

After the visit governors should:

- Discuss what was observed with the class teacher and use the opportunity to clarify any matters.
- Make notes as soon as possible while they are fresh in the mind.
- Discuss what was observed with the headteachers.
- Be prepared to take on board others comments and explanations.
- Reflect on what was observed and experienced.
- Write up the draft report for the governing body, using a standard proforma, and share it with the headteacher and any staff involved before agreeing the final copy.
- Communicate a personal 'thank you' to the teacher concerned.

The written report, using a standard proforma, should include:

- Who made the visit, when and why.
- The purpose of the visit and observation.
- Who was met and what was observed.
- Any observations relevant to the functions and policies of the governing body.
- Any positive comments.

Implementing the Code

There is an expectation that anyone serving as a governor will adhere to this Code of Practice.

In the unlikely event of a serious breach of this Code of Practice, by behaving in a manner that would be inconsistent with the school's ethos, governors have the right to hold an individual governor to account. This may involve suspension of the governor by the governing body, pending an investigation into the alleged area of concern, and ultimately a request to the nominating authority (for example the Local Authority or the Archdiocese of Cardiff) to have a governor removed from the governing body. In the case of a staff member of the governing body who has been suspended from school, pending a disciplinary investigation, the staff member governor should be suspended from the governing body. In all cases of potential suspicion of breaches of the Code of Conduct, the Chair of Governors must seek further advice and guidance from the Archdiocesan Director of Schools.

Conclusion

School governance is an important ministry in the life of the Church and Foundation. Governors have the responsibility of assisting the bishop by sustaining and developing the Catholic ethos and distinctive Catholic nature of the school. Their task is to ensure that at all times the school is conducted in accordance with the provisions of the Archdiocesan Trust Deed. The Archdiocese thanks governors for their commitment and dedication to children's learning and the Church's mission. This Code of Conduct is designed to assist Catholic school governors to fulfil their ministry with integrity and professionalism.