

The Role of the Co-opted Governor

What is a co-opted governor?

All governors have equal responsibility, voting rights (depending on conflict of interests) and accountability. The only difference is the route by which co-opted governors are appointed to the governing board.

Co-opted governors are appointed by the governing board on the basis of the skills required and in line with the governing board's instrument of governance.

A co-opted governor is a person appointed by the governing board who, in the opinion of the board, has the relevant skills to contribute to the effective governance and overall success of the school.

Committee allocation and membership rights

The governing board should appoint the co-opted governor to the committee where their skills and knowledge can best be utilised.

Co-opted governors are entitled to full voting rights at FGB and committee level from the time of appointment. Co-opted governors are expected to follow the governing board's agreed code of conduct.

If a co-opted governor breaches the governing board's code of conduct, they can be removed from their post following an investigation and, if applicable, by a resolution to remove them from the governing board, although this is considered a last resort and the governing board will look to resolve the majority of issues that arise. This process will be set out in the governing board's code of conduct.

Following appointment

Once the appointment of the co-opted governor has been agreed by the governing board, the governor will:

- Be issued with a letter of appointment detailing the committee(s) they have agreed to join.
- Be provided with an induction pack and invited to meet the headteacher, school staff and pupils, and be given a tour of the school.
- Be provided with pertinent information, e.g. meeting dates, the governing board's code of conduct, minutes from previous meetings and the SDP.
- Be allocated a mentor to supplement the induction process.
- Be made aware, as a minimum, of induction, safeguarding and prevent training available.
- Be provided with any logins and access arrangements to subscription services and GovernorHub.

What information is required?

All governors are requested to provide information to the school to be listed on the DfE's register of all schools and colleges in England, 'Get information about schools' (GIAS). Any information provided by members of the governing board must be shared with the Secretary of State via GIAS. The only information relating to governors that is publicly available on GIAS is their names.

The information governors are requested to provide includes the following:

- Full name (to include title)
- Postcode
- Date of birth
- Any previous names
- Nationality
- Direct email address for the chair of the full governing board

All new governors are required to undertake an enhanced DBS check within 21 days of appointment – governors will be required to provide the following information for the check to be completed:

- Full name (including title)
- Address and previous address, if living at current address less than three years.
- Postcode
- Date of birth
- Any previous names
- Nationality
- Documents to prove, e.g. photographic driving license, passport, utility bill or birth certificate.

All new governors must be checked against the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA) Teacher Services register to confirm the governor is not barred from working with children.

Expected time commitments

As with all governors, co-opted governors are expected to attend FGB meetings – there are usually around six governing board meetings per academic year.

If the governing board has chosen to delegate certain functions to committees, co-opted governors can be asked to sit on one or more of the committees; these committees could be, for example, teaching and learning, finance and resource committees.

Membership of committees is based on the skills and expertise of all governors, particularly co-opted governors, and a co-opted governor may be asked to complete a skills audit to establish where their skills would be best used. There can be between three and six committee meetings to attend per year, in addition to FGB meetings.

Responsibilities of a co-opted governor

The 'Governance handbook' (2020) states that all governing boards have three core functions:

- Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
- Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
- Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

Effective governance is based on six key features: strategic leadership, accountability, people, structures, compliance and evaluation. These features set out how governors undertake their role and guide their purpose, also directing how governance is organised and continually developed and improved. Governance is a collective responsibility and no one governor is responsible for ensuring the six key features are present.

Co-opted governors should be prepared to question and challenge, as this is a key aspect of holding school leaders to account. New co-opted governors are a valuable resource for schools and governing boards; they can provide a fresh perspective, bring up-to-date information, and question embedded practices and the status quo.

A key responsibility of any new governor is asking questions to ensure their understanding develops for them to get to know the school, its strengths and development needs and what effective governance looks like. It is recommended that new co-opted governors are assigned a mentor and this person can be a useful point of contact for questions to be asked.

All governors, including co-opted governors, have a responsibility to prepare effectively for meetings by reading all paperwork distributed and planning any questions arising from their preparation.

An effective co-opted governor should:

- Support the aims of the school.
- Spend time in the school and get to know staff members.
- Work closely with fellow governors, the headteacher and SLT to raise standards and improve outcomes for all pupils.
- Prepare for meetings by reading previous minutes and other relevant documents.
- Take responsibility for their own learning and development, including by attending school-organised training.
- Attend all FGB and committee meetings promptly, regularly and for the full duration.
- Read relevant briefings and newsletters.
- Support and stand by the decisions made by the governing board.
- Respect the confidentiality of governing board affairs.
- Declare all conflicts of interest as soon as they arise.
- Understand the broader responsibilities as a governor of a school and promote accountability for the actions of the governing board.