



# **The Aspire Educational Trust**

## **Governor's Handbook**

# Introduction

## **The Role of the School Governor as seen by the Department for Education (May 2013)**

Governing Bodies are the key strategic decision makers in every school and a key part of the overall system of school accountability. They have a vital role to play in driving up school and pupil performance and ensuring every child receives the best possible education.

The education system is changing rapidly. Every school needs a high performing LGB that:

- Understands its responsibilities and focusses on its core strategic functions
- Is made up of people with relevant skills and experience
- Operates efficiently and effectively through appropriate structures and procedures

It believes that good governance in all types of schools is characterised by a focus on three core strategic functions:

- Setting vision, ethos and strategic direction
- Holding Headteachers and Principals to account for teaching, achievement, behaviour and safety, to challenge and strengthen leadership.
- Ensuring finances are managed well, leading to probity, solvency and effective use of financial resources

These functions are reflected directly in the new criteria that Ofsted inspectors will use when considering the effectiveness of governing bodies, as set out in the 'School Inspection Handbook'

It is a key role of governors to appoint and then performance manage the headteacher or Principals, who is accountable to the LGB for the day-to-day management of the school.

The 'School Inspection Handbook' sets out clear criteria of the characteristics of high quality governance. The right relationship between the LGB, especially the chair of governors, and the headteacher or Principals is key to making a reality of school-level accountability.

Every inspection report will contain an explicit comment on the quality of a school's governance in light of the criteria set out in the inspection handbook. Where governance is weak in a school that 'requires improvement', inspectors may recommend an external review of governance arrangements.

The Department for Education has published a new handbook for governors (May 2013) which is essential reading for governors in all types of school.

This handbook is specific to Academies and it is vital that governors in AET academies are familiar with it and understand the relationship between the local governing body and the Trust.

In doing so, they might also consider the information in the Ofsted report below which identified the common features which made Primary Schools outstanding

### **Twenty outstanding primary schools – Ofsted, October 2009**

Twenty schools that do make a difference.

The following characteristics revealed themselves during visits to the schools.

- They provide affection, stability and a purposeful and structured experience
- They build . and often rebuild . children's self-belief
- They teach children the things they really need to know and show them how to learn for themselves and with others
- They give them opportunities, responsibility and trust in an environment which is both stimulating and humanising
- They listen to their pupils, value their views and reflect and act on what they say
- They build bridges with parents, families and communities, working in partnership with other professionals
- They ensure their pupils progress as fast as possible and achieve as much as possible (outperforming both similar schools and many with fewer challenges)
- In short, they put the child at the centre of everything they do, and high aspirations, expectations and achievement underpin the schools' work.

These are characteristics that fit closely to The AET ethos and principles.

# **The Composition and constitution of the Local Governing Body (LGB)**

## **Constitution of the LGB**

The Trust delegates the running of the Academy to the LGB and specifically the following duties:

### **Vision and Accountability**

- The LGB will be expected to carry forward the Trust's vision, in a way which is appropriate to the specific qualities and community characteristics of each Academy. Each Academy should produce a clear vision statement for publication to all the stakeholders for the Academy
- The LGB will be expected to comply with statutory regulations, the financial policies, procedures and decisions of the Trust and the Funding Agreements
- The LGB will be expected to implement the policies set by the Trust, including the policies regarding admission, Safeguarding, health and safety and any others agreed by the Directors from time to time
- The LGB has oversight of the Academy's activities and is expected to hold the Academy leadership to account for academic performance, finances and financial management and the quality of care and provision for the pupils

### **Budgets**

- The LGB may enter into contracts subject to financial limits agreed by the Trust and delegated to the LGB in the Finance Manual and to make payments accordingly
- The LGB will approve the annual budget plan for the Academy.
- The LGB is expected to monitor monthly expenditure and take appropriate action in accordance with the Academies Finance Manual.

## **Staffing**

- The LGB will be responsible for determining the staff complement within the bounds of affordability and also dismissal payments and early retirement with the prior approval of the Trust
- In consultation with the LGB, the Trust is responsible for the appointment of the Principals and may take an active role in the appointment of other members of the Strategic Leadership Team. Where such vacancies arise, the LGB should contact the Trust for specific advice and support
- Equally, in consultation with the LGB, the Trust is responsible for the dismissal of Principals in line with HR procedures

## **Curriculum**

- The LGB will monitor the policy's implementation. It will also be responsible for the charging and remissions policy for activities.

## **Performance Management (appraisal)**

- The LGB is responsible for the appraisal arrangements for the Principal in line with Trust policy and with support from an external adviser appointed or approved by the Trust. The LGB should establish a committee of three governors for this purpose. The committee conducting Principal appraisal should ensure that performance targets proposed are in line with whole school target setting.

## **Target Setting**

The LGB will be responsible for setting and publishing targets for pupil achievement. These should be set in the autumn term LGB meeting and include ambitious targets for that academic year and projections for the following academic year.

## **Pupil Discipline/ Exclusions**

- The LGB will be responsible for the monitoring of a discipline (behaviour) policy for the Academy which is in line with best practice nationally and which encourages positive behaviour in the Academy. It will also monitor the use of both fixed term and permanent exclusions.

- The LGB will also need to decide whether or not to confirm all permanent exclusions and fixed term exclusions where a pupil is either excluded for more than 15 days in total in a term or the exclusion would mean that the pupil would miss a public examination.
- The LGB will establish a committee of at least three governors to consider each decision by the Principal to permanently exclude a pupil from the Academy and either confirm the Principal's decision or direct reinstatement. In making this decision, the committee should be mindful of the impact of their decision on the individual pupil, on the pupils in the school in general and on the Principal's responsibility to maintain good order and safety in the Academy. The decision to exclude a pupil must be lawful, reasonable and fair+ (Statutory guidance and regulations on exclusions, DfE updated 20<sup>th</sup> February 2013) Please see this statutory guidance for full details of the Principal's and Governors's responsibilities for exclusions.

### **Admissions**

- The Trust adheres to the Admissions Policy applying to community schools within the local authority of the Academy.

### **Collective Worship**

- Where the Academy does not have a religious character, the LGB will be responsible for the arrangements for collective worship.

### **Premises and Insurance**

The LGB (alongside the Trust) will be responsible for:

- Developing an Academy buildings strategy
- Procuring and maintaining buildings through a properly funded maintenance plan

### **Health and Safety**

- The LGB will be responsible for implementing the AET health and safety policy and ensuring that appropriate procedures are in place. They will appoint a governor with responsibility for health and safety. (see below)

### **School Organisation**

- The LGB will be responsible for the structure of the school day and for the arrangements for school lunches, being mindful that nutritional standards are being met.

### **Information for Parents**

- The LGB will be responsible for ensuring that there are good arrangements in place to provide information to parents. This should include:
  - Information on the provision of free school meals for those pupils who are eligible
  - The review of home school arrangements

### **LGB Procedures**

- The LGB will establish and maintain a register of Governors' financial interests and regularly check that there are no conflicts of interest.

### **Finances and Assets**

- Within the Trust the AET board is responsible for approving the budgets for all academies. Nevertheless financial responsibility for managing the finances of an AET academy is delegated to the LGB. The LGB will be responsible for the establishment and monitoring of the Academy's budget in accordance with Academies Finance Manual and linker to the Scheme of Delegation. In doing so the LGB should ensure that the Academy is seeking and achieving value for money.
- These matters will usually be further delegated to the Finance Committee (see below) but it is the responsibility of the whole LGB to set the annual budget.

### **Staffing and appointments**

- The LGB will be responsible for strategic staffing issues within the Academy and under the operational leadership of the Principals. Staffing policies are set by the Trust and Academies are expected to implement these
- The staffing structure of the Academy is a matter for the LGB and Principal and should be kept under review

- The appointment of the Principal is made by the Trust in partnership with the LGB under recruitment guidelines from the Trust. The appointment of Vice Principals and Assistant Principals may also include the involvement of the Trust, at their discretion. The Trust should be notified once it is known that a member of the senior leadership team has resigned
- Other Academy staff are appointed by the LGB. It is advised that three people are involved in posts of TLR or above and no fewer than two for all other posts. Governors should be involved in all appointments at TLR level or above and in other appointments as considered appropriate by the LGB

## **General**

Governors should act in the best interests of the Academy and the Trust at all times.

The Directors of the Trust reserve the right to withdraw delegated powers from the LGB and/or reorganise it at any time.

On appointment each governor should read and/or comply with:

- The LGB terms of reference
- The scheme of delegation
- The Governors Handbook
- And any terms of reference for committees which may apply to that governor.

Governors will be expected to carry out training and take part in regular self-review. Governors should take charge of their own training both individually and as a team. The Trust will provide specific training to governors but otherwise LGBs should commission training according to their needs.



# What Governors and Principals Should Expect of Each Other

## Support and Challenge

The governors role is to both challenge and support the leadership of the Academy to ensure that the agreed vision for the Academy is delivered. Governors need to be aware of the progress the school is making through regular reviews and discussion. This needs to be regular, rigorous and supported by data. It also needs to be set into the context of each cohort and of cohorts over time. Governors need to be aware of the challenges that the leadership is facing and of the measures being taken to meet these challenges.

## Support

The governors need to publicly support the actions agreed at LGB meetings even when these will prove difficult and unpopular. The Chair of Governors and the LGB have a role to play in staffing decisions that may result in reorganisation and redundancy. They have a role in the performance management of the Principal but also in supporting the leadership of the school in delivering effective performance management for all members of staff. The Principal needs the support of the LGB to ensure high quality teaching and learning throughout the Academy and must be able to rely on this when the going gets tough.

**The LGB is also responsible for the well-being of the Principal and should actively promote a sensible work life balance for the Principal and throughout the institution.** The relationship between the LGB and the Principal should be a positive one. The governors are responsible for succession planning for the Principal and need to ensure that the role of leader in their Academy is an attractive one which will bring a strong field of candidates when the time comes for the current Principal to move on. To ensure that this is the case, the governors need to make sure that they see their role as being supportive of the leadership of the Academy and that the challenge that they regularly make is to be sure that they are fully informed and able to provide that support as the need arises.

## Challenge

The new Ofsted framework has firmly linked effective governance with effective leadership of the Academy. Both need to be good to achieve a good grade from the inspection. This was with regard to the School Data Dashboard which is now available for every school in the country and which will provide the basic data of which all governors should be aware and fully understand.

## **Positions within the LGB**

The Chair and the Vice-Chair of Governors will be appointed by the LGB.

Chairs for agreed committees (see below) will be elected by the LGB or by members of that committee and there will be governors with specific additional responsibilities for aspects of the life of the Academy (see below).

## **Role of the Chair and Vice-Chair of Governors**

The Chair of the LGB is responsible for the efficient running of governors meetings. He/she will liaise with the clerk to the LGB and the committee Chairs to ensure that agendas and associated papers are prepared in good time and circulated before the meeting. This should, as a minimum, be 7 days. It will be the expectation that governors will have read the papers before the meeting to contribute to the effective and efficient government of the Academy. Ideally no meeting of the LGB should exceed about two hours and it is the Chair's role to ensure proper discussion and participation within this timescale.

The Chair will be expected to meet regularly with the Principal and establish a professional working relationship with the Principal and the Senior Leadership Team of the Academy.

The Vice-Chair of the LGB will substitute for the Chair in his/her absence and should follow the guidance set out above. Where the absence of the Chair is known in good time, it would be good practice for the Chair and Vice-Chair to liaise in some detail to ensure that the Vice-Chair is properly prepared for the meeting. It is likely that the Vice-Chair will also be the Chair of one of the committees and, therefore, experienced in leading fellow governors in the work of the LGB.

## **Role of the Clerk to the Governors**

The Trust is responsible for the appointment of the clerk to the governors. This is a crucial role for the smooth running of the LGB. Not only should the clerk prepare agendas and circulate papers under the guidance of the Chair of Governors, they are also responsible for the efficient preparation of minutes of the meetings and their circulation. The clerk will need to maintain a register of interests of governors and keep careful details of attendance, absence and apologies to enable the Chair to monitor the commitment of each Governor.

The clerk will also assist the committee chairs in the preparation of agenda, papers and minutes and ensure that these are circulated as appropriate to the committee members with minutes going to all governors prior to local LGB

meetings. A copy of all LGB meeting minutes (including committees) will be stored on The Trust Governor.

The clerk will be expected to be familiar with this ~~the~~ Governor Handbook

The Clerk may assist in ensuring that the election process for Parent and Staff governors is carried out correctly and may be expected to support the disciplinary process by taking minutes as required. Arrangements for these events may, however, vary from Academy to Academy.

## **Governors with Additional Responsibilities**

Individual governors will be asked to take responsibility on behalf of the LGB for the oversight of key aspects of the life of the Academy. These must include:

- special educational needs
- safeguarding
- health and safety
- the allocation and effectiveness of pupil premium

### **The SEN Governor**

The governor with responsibility for Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be expected to liaise with the Senior Leadership Team and the SEN Coordinator as their key focus area during visits to the Academy. The SEN Governor should know how the children with SEN are identified and how this is used to ensure that pupils with SEN receive the help they need to access the curriculum and participate in the full life of the Academy. The SEN Governor should organise regular meetings with the SEN Co-ordinator and focus on SEN issues during Academy visits.

With the Principals, the SEN Governor should be able to report back to the LGB on the work being done in this area and inform the LGB of any issues that might arise.

### **The Safeguarding Governor**

The LGB needs to be satisfied that proper safeguarding procedures are in place as part of the safeguarding policy which should meet statutory requirements. It is the role of the governor with responsibility for safeguarding to take an interest in this area and keep the LGB up-to-date on changes or issues that might arise, supported by the Principal.

Ofsted has produced a best practice guide %Safeguarding in schools: best practice September 2011, No. 100240+ which details outstanding practice in safeguarding. The key features they identified were:

- high-quality leadership and management that makes safeguarding a priority across all aspects of a school's work
- stringent vetting procedures in place for staff and other adults
- rigorous safeguarding policies and procedures in place, written in plain English, compliant with statutory requirements and updated regularly; in particular, clear and coherent child protection policies

- child protection arrangements that are accessible to everyone, so that pupils and families, as well as adults in the school, know who they can talk to if they are worried
- excellent communication systems with up-to-date information that can be accessed and shared by those who need it
- a high priority given to training in safeguarding, generally going beyond basic requirements, extending expertise widely and building internal capacity
- robust arrangements for site security, understood and applied by staff and pupils
- a curriculum that is flexible, relevant and engages pupils' interest; that is used to promote safeguarding, not least through teaching pupils how to stay safe, how to protect themselves from harm and how to take responsibility for their own and others' safety
- courteous and responsible behaviour by the pupils, enabling everyone to feel secure and well-protected
- well thought out and workable day-to-day arrangements to protect and promote pupils' health and safety
- rigorous monitoring of absence, with timely and appropriate follow-up, to ensure that pupils attend regularly
- risk assessment taken seriously and used to good effect in promoting safety

The Safeguarding Governor will work with the designated child protection member of SLT to support the development of outstanding practice. The Trust's Safeguarding Policy is a matter for the whole LGB and the Safeguarding Governor will ensure that other governors are properly informed of the key issues.

### **The Health and Safety Governor**

The governor responsible for Health and Safety should liaise with the Principals and the Academy Business Manager (where appropriate) to ensure that the requirements of health and safety for the Academy are properly carried out.

Each Academy should have Health and Safety as part of the remit of a committee which meets regularly and keeps these issues under review. The Health and Safety governor would be a member of this committee and the link between it and the LGB.

The Committee dealing with Health and Safety should meet at least once each term and will:

- ensure that staff are appropriately trained in health and safety

- ensure that visitors and contractors on the site comply with Health and Safety regulations and best practice
- identify any concerns around the site which might be a hazard to users of the Academy
- make recommendations to the Principals and the LGB for site safety improvements within the available funding
- ensure that agreed systems are complied with.

The Health and Safety Governor should regularly report to the LGB on Health and Safety matters and participate in a site inspection at least once a year.

### **The Pupil Premium Governor**

This governor should monitor the effectiveness of the use of the Pupil Premium and ensure that the LGB is informed of progress and issues related to this, in particular impact. Guidance on good practice in spending pupil premium money can be found in [The Pupil Premium: how schools are spending the funding successfully to maximise achievement - Ofsted Feb 2013+](#)

## LGB Meetings

Meetings of the LGB should be purposeful, effective and make efficient use of the time that volunteer governors generously give to support the Academy.

The LGB will meet at least once every term. Along with the standard items for each meeting there should be:

- reports from each committee
- reports from the SEN, Safeguarding, Health and Safety and Pupil Premium Governors if appropriate
- report from the Chair on any actions taken in the interim period
- The Principal's report. This will generally be the main agenda item and should embrace the key issues that governors will need to assess the progress of the Academy (see below).
- AOB. Except in extreme circumstances, AOB items should be submitted to the Chair in good time before the meeting to allow the issue to be itemised for governors to consider before the meeting. It is at the Chair's discretion whether AOB items are accepted.

The agenda and supporting papers should be prepared and circulated in advance to give time for governors to read them before the meeting. It is good practice for governors to receive the papers at least seven days prior to the meeting and, except in extreme circumstances, papers should not be tabled at the LGB meeting.

On the assumption that pre-reading has taken place, the Chair should take questions and points of clarification on each of the papers presented but the papers should not be re-read line by line in the meeting. **LGB meetings should last no more than about 2 hours.**

To ensure the engagement of governors in the rapidly changing educational context in which all schools and academies operate, it is recommended that the Chair of Governors and the committee chairs (including the Vice-Chair of Governors if not a committee chair) should meet with the Principal and SLT in the half term when there isn't a full LGB meeting. This Chairs Committee is often seen as crucial when the Academy is facing challenging circumstances but is a useful device in all cases to keep the governors fully informed and up-to-date. Where the Chairs Committee is used, meetings should have agenda and be have minutes taken in the usual way with copies of the minutes included in the papers for the next LGB meeting.

## **Suggested meeting structure for the year**

Including the Chairs Committee and Committee meetings, the pattern of LGB meeting for the year is as follows:

### **Autumn Term**

- Committee meetings (Autumn Term 1)
- Principals Appraisal Committee
- Full LGB (Autumn Term 2)
- Directors meeting

### **Spring Term**

- Committee meetings (Spring Term 1)
- Mid-year Principals Appraisal Committee
- Full LGB (Spring Term 2)
- Directors meeting

### **Summer Term**

- Committee meetings (Summer Term 1)
- Full LGB (Summer Term 2)
- Directors meeting



## LGB and Ofsted

The governors should be aware how OFSTED will judge their effectiveness. This will help them to understand that their involvement is strategic and not in any way to be engaged in the day-to-day management of the Academy and its functions. The Ofsted judgements are based upon how well the governors:

- ensure clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction
- contribute to the Academy's self-review and evaluation and understand its strengths and weaknesses
- analyse monitoring data, particularly pupil progress
- support and strengthen Academy leadership
- provide challenge and hold the Principals and other senior leaders to account for improving the quality of teaching, pupils' achievement and pupils' behaviour and safety
- use performance management systems, including the performance management of the Principal, to improve teaching, leadership and management
- ensure solvency and probity and that the financial resources made available to the Academy are managed effectively
- operate in such a way that statutory duties are met and priorities are approved
- engage with key stakeholders
- use the pupil premium and other resources to overcome barriers to learning, including reading, writing and mathematics.

It is important that this detailed view of the Academy is shared and understood across the whole LGB. It is quite possible that inspectors will want to meet with more than the Chair of Governors who, in any case given the short notice of inspections, may not be available when the inspectors are in the Academy.

Governors should become familiar with the key data sets which show them how the Academy is performing. This will include the DfE Data Dashboard which provides a simple and accessible visual representation of key performance data. It is anticipated that the Principal's report to governors will include reference to and training in the more complex data sets such as RAISE Online and Fischer Family Trust data.

At every LGB meeting there should be an update on pupil achievement, including attendance and exclusions. There are key questions for governors to ask about any data they are presented with regarding school improvement.

- What does it mean?
- Why is it like this?
- What are we doing about it?

- How successful have we been so far?

The LGB will meet at specific times of the year and the governors should expect to be able to gauge progress in the Academy from one meeting to the next. In order to do this, governors need to ask:

- Where were we at the last report?
- Where are we now?
- What progress we have made?
- How do we know?

This is appropriate challenge in the relationship between the LGB and the Principal and SLT of the Academy. To ensure that this good practice is seen by Ofsted, it is crucial that this is clearly minuted by the Clerk to the LGB to enable Ofsted to see the proper levels of challenge and support by the LGB.

## **LGB Committees**

There will be 4 committees:

**Standards**

**Finance**

**Behaviour and Safety**

**Personnel and Performance**

The make up of the committees will be decided by the LGB in the autumn term meeting or as needed if governors change. It is anticipated that the Vice-Chair will chair one of the committees with the other chair elected by the members of that committee. However, the LGB can decide other arrangements.

The Principals may arrange for other members of staff to be in attendance at committee meetings and the full LGB, for example, the Business Manager or Bursar for the Resources Committee and the Vice Principals or Assistant Principals responsible for achievement/teaching and learning for the Academy Improvement Committee.

Other committees may be needed from time to time to deal with staff and pupil disciplinary matters and complaints. It is likely that these will be convened from those governors able to be present at the required time but it is good practice to offer training in these areas on a regular basis to provide a base of knowledge in the LGB from which to draw. The need for these committees happens rarely and advice should be sought from the HR provider as required.

**Each committee has their own terms of reference – see below:**

## **What Are My Personal Responsibilities?**

### **The Code of Practice**

Governors should conduct themselves at all times in accordance with the National Governors Association (NGA).

The Code of Practice deals with conflicts of interest and it is important that the Clerk to the LGB maintains an up-to-date record of governors' interests to ensure that conflicts do not arise during the year. It is a duty of governors to comply with this procedure. This can usually be achieved by keeping a ~~B~~Business Interests' file updated at each LGB meeting with the understanding that significant changes need to be reported to the clerk as the year progresses.

It should also be a standing item on each LGB agenda to declare any potential pecuniary or business interest (related to that meeting). Such interest can be very wide and include close relatives where a company they are associated with might gain from an Academy contract. Again, Governors have a duty to comply with this.

### **Visiting the Academy**

It is important that governors visit the Academy to familiarise themselves with its working practices and evaluate its effectiveness. It is important to remember that these visits are not part of the monitoring of teaching and learning but serve to provide governors with an overview of the context within which staff and pupils are working. There is no substitute for seeing the Academy in action to inform the debate in LGB meetings and governors should aim to visit the Academy at least once per term to build up a picture of it as a working institution.

**Visits should comply with the 'Governors monitoring handbook.'**

## **Governor Recruitment, Development and Training**

### **Recruitment and Induction of new Governors**

The LGB will keep the strength of the LGB under constant review. Governors are recruited according to their individual skills and potential to contribute to the work of the LGB of the Academy. In this context, annual skills audits for the LGB are increasingly commonplace and are expected in AET Academies through Trust Governor.

This skills audit will identify areas for future recruitment and LGBs should be actively seeking potential governors even where no current vacancy exists. With the approval of the Trust, identified new LGB members can be invited to participate and learn the ropes as Associate Members (if vacancies exist). This will provide an excellent induction to the work of the LGB. New recruits should also be issued with a copy of this handbook and associated papers, provided with key information about who is who on the LGB and invited to tour the Academy with the Principal and Chair of Governors or some other arrangement as appropriate.

LGBs should also be active in succession planning for key roles in the LGB. Given the crucial role that governors now play in the external assessment of the effectiveness of schools, the need for succession planning for the Chair of Governors is of great importance. Equally, the effective leadership of the committees should also be seen as of critical importance to ensure that the evidence of support and challenge from the LGB is maintained.

### **Filling governor vacancies**

Whilst AET is responsible for setting up the initial LGB on conversion to Academy status, when any further vacancies occur the LGB should take action to fill in the following manner:

## **Governor dismissal**

Occasionally a governor may find it difficult to attend meetings or may behave in such a way that it causes difficulty for the LGB team. In the first instance the Chair should seek to address this matter directly with the individual governor. Where this does not resolve the issue the Chair should contact HR.

The governor will be given the opportunity to put their point of view to HR. This may be done in writing, by phone or in person. The HR Director will then make a decision on how to resolve the issue. This may include dismissing the governor from the LGB. The governor may appeal to the CEO who will consider the factors resulting in the dismissal and either confirm the dismissal or suggest an alternative action.