

# The Role of the Chair of the Governing Body

## September 2018

The Chair (and Vice Chair) must be elected annually in accordance with the School Governance (Roles, Procedures and Allowances) (England) Regulations 2013, Regulation 7 SI 2013/1624).

As the title suggests, the Chair has an important role at meetings of the governing body. The offer to serve as Chair should be made in the spirit of service to the school and its governing body. Understandably, not all governors have the necessary time and vision for this role and to be elected as Chair is a sign of the governors' confidence in their colleague's leadership, should this cease to be the case the Chairperson would have to stand down. Effective governing bodies are models of good team spirit and sound leadership.

The Chair has a vital role in ensuring that the governors share with the staff and parents the school's aims and objectives and that these are at the forefront of all they undertake. The importance of the Chair being a Catholic cannot be over-estimated if due regard is to be given to promoting the Catholic ethos in all aspects of school life. It is to be hoped therefore that foundation governors especially will prepare themselves to stand for election as Chair, and normally a foundation governor is to be elected.

The Chair's relationship with the Headteacher is fundamental to the school's success. Regular meetings and ready access of each to the other is essential. The Chair must be supportive of the Headteacher, whose post can be a lonely one, and may learn much that is of a sensitive and confidential nature, which cannot always be shared with other governors. The Chair will also build relationships with individual staff and parents and may need to be cautious at times about being drawn into discussions on matters which should correctly have first been referred to the Headteacher. Skill is required in such areas to ensure that the Chair's involvement enhances rather than, as can happen, undermines established relationships within the school. In turn, the Headteacher must support the Chair by encouraging his/her open access to the school and facilitating governors' involvement in the decision making for which they are legally responsible. The governing body's relationship with the head teacher is clearly set out in the 'Governance Handbook for Academies, Multi-Academy Trusts and Maintained Schools: January 2017' which includes a summary of governors' responsibilities.

Apart from knowledge of the school and how it works, the Chair must be familiar with the local community within which the school is set and keep abreast of relevant policies of local and central government, together with information from the Diocesan Education Service. The stream of information and diversity of governors' responsibilities often requires the setting up of working parties or committees. Such delegation of functions is described in Part 5 of the 2013 Regulations.

Sometimes those new to the role of governor can feel overwhelmed by the task and there is a real need for the Chair to see that help is available for those on a 'learning curve' and for him/her to encourage and support all who give their time as governors so that they feel of value to the school. The ideal is for all governors to develop skills and grow in confidence so that no one is required to hold the office of Chair for extended periods.

All governors must recognise that their power lies in corporate action and the Chair may need to remind fellow governors that only he/she may speak officially for the governors or undertake Chair's action on their behalf. The circumstances justifying the Chair's (or Vice Chair's) action are strictly limited and are set out in Regulation 8 of the 2013 Regulations. The Chair must always

report fully to the meeting immediately following the taking of action, on Chair's action undertaken since the previous governors meeting.

It is mainly at the governors' meeting that concern for the school is translated into action. Sound communication between Chair and Clerk ensures that agenda and relevant documents are circulated at least seven days before the meeting. Effective meetings rely on the Chair's concern for a prompt start with suitable opening prayers, a purposeful focussing on issues, not personalities, and a structured discussion in which facts are established before decisions are made. It is good practice for the Chair to remind fellow governors at the start of each meeting, that the ensuing discussions are restricted to those present and that it is through the published minutes that the proceedings of the meeting are made public. The Chair must have a knowledge of correct committee procedure and, with the clerk, ensure that draft minutes are agreed and circulated as soon as possible after the meeting. Part 4 of the 2013 Regulations give clear guidance on the conduct of meetings.

Particular care should be taken in some cases of discipline, complaint and grievance where procedures provide for a particular role for both head teacher and Chair (or for deputising colleagues). Such matters must not be raised except with those persons and in accordance with the step by step guide indicated in the Diocesan documents, which are available in every school. This ensures that, in the interests of fairness and good practice, governors will ultimately be able to offer opinions and give decisions from an objective and unprejudiced position i.e. without involvement prior to the hearing. Governors must therefore respect the position of the Chair and Head or others of their number charged with the task of carrying out an investigation on confidential basis at a stage before governors themselves are called upon as a body or committee to hear the matter.

With the head teacher, the governors have an important role in the appointment of School Staff. The Chair must ensure that those involved understand the school's mission. (The Diocesan 'Red Book': The Catholic School is a vital document here) and the role of the teacher in a Catholic School (see 'Teaching in a Catholic School'). The Chair must ensure that at every stage of the appointment, employment legislation and natural justice are given due regard. He/she must also foster positive relations with the local authority while remaining alert to those areas where their policies and practices are inappropriate for adoption in Catholic Schools.