

Ysgol Gymraeg Rhyd y Grug – The Role of the Parent Governor

The aim of this leaflet is to provide information and advice to new parent governors on their specific role and suggest ways of handling some of the tricky situations that may arise.

Being a governor is a privilege. The reason governors exist is to ensure that all children receive the very best education possible. A governor is a responsible role and you will have the opportunity to make a difference not only for your children but for children in years to come and your community.

Governors provide strategic direction for the school. This means that we have a very different role to the Headteacher and senior leadership team and we do not tell them how to run the school. The Headteacher and senior leadership team are responsible for what happens in school and this is called operational responsibility.

Here is an illustration often used to explain the different roles of the Governing Body and the Headteacher – *“Consider the school as a bus, the pupils are the passengers, the staff led by the Head Teacher are driving the bus, and the Governing Body is the ‘Sat Nav’. So, whilst the staff (particularly the leadership) are negotiating the traffic and road infrastructure, the Governing Body is setting a destination and a route. We don’t need to instruct the school on how to negotiate a traffic island, but we may have a say on which exit to take.”*

Governors set the strategy for the school and are the point of accountability for the senior leadership team. How well education is delivered, the progress made by pupils and how well the school is financially managed are all part of what governors regularly discuss.

The important questions to governance are “Why” and “What.” We look at impact and the standards achieved. A typical question may be “£15000 was spent on new IT equipment. What was the impact of that?” Understanding both why a decision was made and the impact it has had on learning is vital in school governance.

A reasonable question should always receive a reasonable answer and if you are unsure or there is too much jargon then ask for an explanation. We have all been in the position where we are learning a new role.

Governors work as a team and you should always be supportive of the collective decisions made. You must not express personal dissatisfaction at decisions to the wider school community and if you feel strongly about an issue you should say so at the point the decision is being made. Rumours will result in damage to your school which is the last thing you want.

Parent Governors

Parent governors are in a unique position on a governing body. Not only do parent governors have to work in the best interests of the school, but they have to balance this with their natural desire to see the best outcomes for their own child(ren).

As a parent governor it will sometimes feel that you have to know everything about the school, but can't talk about it and you have to be on everyone's side..... and you have to be able to juggle all these expectations. As a parent you will already be an experienced juggler, but developing your role as a governor will take time. You are not alone! There is advice, help and support you can tap into....and reading this leaflet is the first step.

Parent governors are:	Parent governors are not:
<p>√ well placed to understand parents' views and to remind the governing body how matters being discussed affect parents;</p> <p>√ individuals! How you vote on any decision is up to you;</p> <p>√ in a good position to help the governing body to communicate effectively with parents;</p> <p>√ equal in status to all other governors.</p>	<p>× expected to gather the views of other parents and take them to the governing body;</p> <p>× simply expected to represent the interests of parents;</p> <p>× a link between parents and the governing body;</p> <p>× expected to vote as instructed by other parents</p>

What are the benefits of being a parent governor?

- You have a very privileged and responsible role
- You have the opportunity to make a difference, not only for your children, but for children in years to come
- You will learn a lot and develop new skills

How to fulfil your role

- Attend governing body meetings regularly and play an active role in committees and decision-making.
- Learn all you can about the school.
- Learn how the school handles complaints and read the complaints policy. If another parent approaches you with a complaint or serious concerns, advise them to speak to the headteacher.
- Be approachable to other parents, but make sure you are clear about your role.
- Always represent the school positively, including on social media. Governors are advised to maintain some distance on social networking sites to avoid the risk of becoming involved in conflicts/difficult situations.
- As a governor you are one of a group and must never act alone.
- Always support the decisions of the full governing body. Have your say on decisions in meetings and vote in the way you wish; but then support the outcomes of votes – even if you disagree with them.

- Always observe confidentiality. You will have access to highly sensitive and confidential information – don't discuss it with anyone who is not a governor. Remember, the governing body will have a code of conduct and action can be taken to remove or suspend governors who have revealed confidential information to someone else.

How you can help individual parents

From time to time you may be approached by other parents asking for help, or wanting to make a complaint about something the school is, or isn't doing.

- Make it clear you can't act for the governing body.
- Don't raise expectations that the school will "put it right" – there may be underlying issues or background that you don't know about.
- Keep an open mind – there are at least two sides to every story!
- Maintain a certain distance; later you may be part of a panel which has to consider the information being raised.

What to do if you experience a conflict between being a parent and being a governor

This can happen – especially if you think the governing body is making decisions which you feel will adversely affect your child(ren).

- If a difficulty arises, take a step back and think things through as objectively as you can.
- If you are concerned, talk to the headteacher or to the chair of governors.
- Make sure you don't break confidentiality when discussing your concerns outside governing body meetings.

Where to get help, advice and support

- From other governors.
- From the headteacher.
- From the chair of governors.
- From the clerk to the governing body.
- From your governor mentor or "buddy" who will help you through the first few months.
- Attend the mandatory induction and data training provided by the Local Authority as soon as possible, along with other key sessions relevant to your role (see the Governor Training Programme). You'll meet other new governors and will find lots of people who feel just the same as you.
- Contact the Council's Governor Support team.