

Parent governor/trustee: role

Learn how to separate your role as a governor or trustee from your role as a parent, so you can manage your relationship with other parents and do your job well.

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The Department for Education (DfE) withdrew the [Governance Handbook](#) on **7 March 2024**, and replaced it with 2 separate **new governance guides** for [maintained schools](#) and [academies](#).

Take a look at our summary for [what you need to know about the changes](#).

We're in the process of updating our articles to reflect the new guides. Select '**save for later**' at the top of the page to be notified when this article has been updated.

The role: summary

As a parent governor or trustee, your role is:

- To bring a **parental perspective** to the issues discussed – you're not there to speak 'on behalf' of the parent body
- No different from other governors

Note: parents are elected to the board, not appointed (unless there are fewer candidates than vacancies).

Take a look at our [governor and trustee role descriptions](#) to see all of your responsibilities and duties.

Take our [parent governor/trustee training course](#) to learn more, including how to confidently handle situations that are unique to this role.

Communicate a parent's perspective

It's a fine line to tread, but remember that you're not there to speak on behalf of parents.

Use your perspective to help the board understand a parent's viewpoint. This will help the board make good decisions and maintain a link between governance and the parent community.

You can read more about this in:

- The [Governance Handbook](#) (page 20)
- [Guidance from the Department for Education](#) (DfE) – page 14 for maintained schools, and pages 14, 21 and 22 for academies

Parental perspective in practice

You're not bringing complaints from parents to the board's attention. Rather, you're highlighting how board decisions impact the school or trust from a parent's perspective.

Example	Do ask	Don't say
School uniform change	<p>'Has the school consulted parents on the proposed uniform changes? If not, why not?'</p> <p>'How has the school explained the proposed changes to parents?'</p> <p>'Has the school considered the cost of this change to parents?'</p>	<p>'As a parent, I've spoken to other parents in the playground and we all think the uniform shouldn't change.'</p>
Canteen menu change	<p>'How have parents been consulted on the new menu?'</p> <p>'Has the school explained to parents the reasons behind the change?'</p> <p>'What alternative provision is available for pupils whose parents disagree with the menu changes?'</p> <p>'How will this change impact parents?'</p>	<p>'Parents have come up to me asking why the menu has changed. They say they prefer the old one.'</p>
Curriculum change	<p>'How has the trust communicated the curriculum change to parents?'</p> <p>'Have parents been given the opportunity to ask questions and get further clarity?'</p>	<p>'Parents want me express to you that they disagree with the changes. They don't feel the changes reflect what they want their children to be taught.'</p> <p>'A number of parents have told me they're confused about why the curriculum has changed.'</p>

Set expectations with other parents

Help other parents understand that you're **not** there to:

- Speak on their behalf
- Bring up their individual issues in meetings
- Solve problems for them

Be polite but firm, and tell them to stick to the official channels.

Get up to speed with your school's [complaints procedure](#) and staff list, so you can quickly direct parents to how/where they can raise their issue.

If another parent approaches you at the school gate with a grievance:

- **Do** ask the parent to put it in writing and follow the school's complaints procedure
 - Tell them how/where they can raise their issue. This helps to separate genuine complaints from the customary grumbles
- **Do** explain what the role of parent governor/trustee actually is

- Learn a one-liner such as: "Parent governors don't speak 'on behalf' of the parent body, instead we bring a parental perspective to the strategic decisions the governors make"
- **Don't** agree to raise it at the meeting or look into it for them – this will set a bad precedent and will cause problems later down the line as the right procedure hasn't been followed

Don't respond to comments on social media in your governor or trustee role

You might see comments about the school from parents on social media, perhaps in parent groups you've joined. It's not your role to get involved.

For advice on how to respond in these situations, read our [Facebook 'cheat sheet' for governors](#).

Separate your role as a governor or trustee from your role as a parent

Think about all pupils, not just your child

As a governor or trustee, you're responsible for the progress and wellbeing of **all** pupils at the school/trust, so keep this at the forefront of your mind in meetings. You must rely on a wide range of sources to make decisions and hold senior leaders to account. These include high-quality, objective data and the views of pupils, staff, parents and the community. This is set out in the [Governance Handbook](#) (page 13).

When discussing issues in meetings:

- **Do** remember that you're acting in the interests of the whole pupil body
- **Don't** bring up your child, or refer to anecdotal evidence based only on your child's, or a friend's, experience

Follow your school's complaints procedure like any other parent

If you have a complaint concerning your child, you must follow your school's complaints procedure, even as a parent governor or trustee.

If possible, ask the other parent to lead the discussion with the school. In all communication during the process, clarify that you're acting as a parent.

You could take action as a governor or trustee if the complaint affects more children than your own child. For example, if data shows a wider problem with pupil progress in your child's year group, ask questions in the relevant meetings like:

- What support is in place for underperforming members of staff?
- How does the school help all children who are falling behind?

Avoid conflicts of interest

Most of the time, you won't need to declare a personal interest in all agenda items that could have an impact on your child. You should do this where:

- The matter would affect your child individually
 - For example, an exclusions panel where your child was the victim of a behaviour incident
- You feel too close to the matter to be impartial

Where there is a dispute about whether you should withdraw, the rest of the board may make this decision.

Read our [parent governor conflict of interest scenario](#) to be clear on what conflicts of interest can look like in practice.

If you have concerns over a board decision

Again, remember to keep your role as a parent separate from your role as a governor/trustee.

If you have a concern:

- **Do** raise it in a board meeting
 - Meetings are designed for this purpose: the board can openly discuss decisions the board might take, and board members can express disagreement by voting against a proposal
- **Do** respect the decision taken by the board if it's been voted on properly, and be united with your fellow governors/trustees
- **Do** ask for a meeting with the chair to discuss a decision in more detail if you wish
- **Don't** express your disagreement outside board meetings
- **Don't** involve other parents or seek to mobilise them in any way