

Role of the parent governor

The parent governor's role is unique in that they bring their own perspective as the parent of a school pupil to the governing body. In all other respects though they are the same as the other governors, adhering to the seven [Nolan principles of public life](#), holding the principal and SLT to account.

Eligibility

All OAT academies **must** have two parent governors. Nominees must be selected via a transparent process open to all eligible parents. If more nominations are received than there are vacancies on the LGB, then an election *must* be held. Further guidance on the process with documentation can be found on OATnet under Governance > [Recruitment, Training and Development](#).

Parent governors are **not** required to stand down if their child or children leave the school before their 4-year term of office concludes, and can stay on for the full-term if desired.

Scope of the role

The parent governor is expected to:

- Be familiar with the OAT strategy and the academy ethos and vision
- Contribute to strategic leadership of the academy
- Provide context and parental perspective to issues discussed by the governing body
- Hold the principal and members of the SLT to account
- Help other members of the LGB to understand the culture of the school and identify issues as they arise
- Become a link governor if required
- Commit to furthering knowledge, understanding and expertise in relation to governance, taking up training opportunities where available in line with the LGB training and development plan
- Engage with stakeholders wherever possible, e.g., represent the governing body at parent and pupil events, to help parents and pupils understand the role of the governing body
- Invite other parents to suggest topics to bring before the governors
- Ensure that any parents who may come to you with issues are aware of the appropriate reporting structures if they have a grievance, such as the complaint policy

Limitations on the role

- Parent governors have been elected to provide a parental viewpoint, but not act directly in the interest of individuals – their first duty is pupil wellbeing and the school as a whole
- The parent governor may seem like a natural person for other parents to approach with grievances or problems, but they must be clear that it is not their role to advocate or for individuals; they are not responsible for bringing parental grievances to the governor body's attention.
- They must separate their role as a governor from their role as parent
- Set expectations with other parents – help them to understand that your role isn't to:
 - Speak on their behalf
 - Bring up individual issues in meetings
 - Solve problems for them
- Confidentiality is always advised if parents approach the parent governor with problems, but the governor should also direct them to the appropriate channels, following the standard complaint policy

- If the parent governor becomes aware of a growing theme – i.e., multiple parents coming forward to report the same issue, then the parent governor can request it be added to a future agenda for discussion, submitting a paper with details in advance – but consider if it would be better addressed by the PTA or through another channel
- Avoid conflicts of interest – for instance you should not sit on an exclusion panel where you know the affected children or their parents and already have opinions about them (whether positive or negative, preconceived ideas could, or could be seen to, affect the outcome)

Tips for questioning

Example	Best practice questioning	Best avoided – the personal approach
School uniform change	<p>'How 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>	'As a parent, I've spoken to other parents in the playground and we all think the uniform shouldn't change.'
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>	'Parents have come up to me asking why the menu has changed. They say they prefer the old one.'
Curriculum change	<p>'How has the school 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 to 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>

How to handle difficult conversations with other parents

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

- Do ask the parent to follow the school's complaints policy. Tell them how/where they can raise their issue.
- Do explain what the role of parent governor 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 precedent and can escalate problems later as the right procedure has been bypassed

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

You may 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.

Support for the parent governor

The role of the parent governor offers some unique challenges. All governors must strive for impartiality, but it can be hard representing parent peers on the governing body while not advocating *for* them.

If you have a concern about a decision made by the LGB:

- Do raise it in a governing body meeting. Meetings are designed for this purpose: governors can openly discuss decisions the governing board might take, and governors can express disagreement by voting against it
- Do respect the decision taken by the board if it's been voted on properly, and be united with your fellow governors
- Do ask for a meeting with the chair to discuss a decision in more detail if you wish
- Don't express your disagreement outside governing board meetings
- Don't involve other parents or seek to mobilise them in opposition of a decision you personally didn't agree with but the LGB approved with a majority.

The OAT governance team is also on hand to support staff governors with queries and advice – if a parent governor is unsure who to turn to, or needs help with an issue or question, then they should not hesitate to get in touch.