

Effective Governance for High Quality Education





Foreward

I am delighted to welcome the publication of this revised guidance for boards of governors of Catholic maintained schools. It reinforces many of the important messages in the previous guidance, reflects some of the important educational changes that have taken place in recent years and introduces a new code of conduct for governors which I hope you will find helpful.

The governance of schools is a very important process undertaken by skilled and committed volunteers who share the collective mission of supporting school leaders and their staff, parents and pupils in helping make our schools successful centres of Catholic education.

Over recent years the education of our young people has become increasingly challenging and the process of governing schools has become more complex. Excellence in school governance requires the development of a very special and effective relationship between the principal, leadership team of the school and the governors. Successful schools have boards of governors which are skilfully led by the chair of governors and have a well-planned governance strategy which aims to raise standards and ensure that the leadership and management of the school is as effective as possible.

This revised guidance deals with the key responsibilities of school governance and provides a suggested route through the many aspects of governance that you will have to face each year. Under each of the six key areas of governance responsibility, it provides a series of questions that will help governors challenge and support the principal and senior leaders of the school and seek information to support you in your governance work. We offer this as a support and guide to you and hope that you find it helpful. Every school has its own particular set of circumstances but all schools share the key governance tasks in common.

In CCMS we are committed to providing governors with the help and support they need to maximise their effectiveness. This guidance will work hand in hand with our revised Scheme of Management and the other range of support services we make available for schools. Catholic schools are very successful and governors have contributed very significantly to that success. I wish to acknowledge the work that governors do for our schools, thank you for being a governor and wish you every success for the future.

I would also like to thank Mr Terry Murphy, former Head of Education Standards in CCMS for the valuable contribution he made in compiling this document.

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INTRODUCTION



As a new member of a board of governors for a school you may well be thinking “I am not really sure what I am supposed to do. What support/training is available to help me fulfil my duties to a high standard? Can I get advice when it is needed? Am I the right person for this role?”

All the knowledge and experience you have acquired personally and professionally has made you a suitable person to take on this role. It requires dedication to the well-being of all those involved in the school community, an ability to co-operate with others and a willingness to question and consequently make decisions for the good of the school.

A certain amount of knowledge and information is required. Don’t worry, there will be training available. You will also be able to access strategic or policy information from the Department of Education (DE), from the Council For Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), and from the Education and Library Board (ELB). This should always be done under the aegis of your school and with the agreement of the full board of governors.

The school principal is the expert on and primary source of information about the particular situation of your school. The governors delegate responsibility to the principal for the day-to-day running of the school. He/she is free to manage all aspects of the life of the school in line with the school ethos and its policies. He/she is accountable to the governors.

Being a governor is not just about the title nor is it simply about attending meetings. It is important that you know the school and the community it serves. Go to events, join sub-committees and get involved in promoting the school. It is equally important, however, that your time is used productively. Meetings should be well planned, strategically focussed and objective in addressing issues.

This document is an overview of the role of a school governor and some of the main responsibilities you will hold and the tasks you will carry out. It also contains a copy of the CCMS “Code of Conduct for a School Board of Governors.”

Situations will arise which are particular to your school and you will have the resources to deal with them. Hopefully this document will assist you in understanding your role and having the confidence that you are contributing positively to the educational experience of the pupils in your school.



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Summary of Roles and Responsibilities of Boards of Governors

The Governors' handbook states:

“The role of the board of governors is to fulfil its statutory functions in relation to the school and to be accountable for ensuring that its decisions support the best interest of the school and its pupils.”



The following is a breakdown of areas that governors must address to ensure that they are fulfilling their responsibilities.

Ethos

The Board of Governors should aim to support the overall development of the pupils in the school. This includes their moral, spiritual, intellectual, social and personal development. Governors should ensure that the pastoral needs of the pupils are being met, that they are being challenged academically and that they have a sound understanding of how to live in a diverse society, recognising and respecting the rights of others while developing their own religious education.

School Development Planning

The three year school development plan will be drawn up after consultation with all those involved in the school community. Priorities should be set that are based on school needs and any new educational developments. The members of the Board of Governors need to be familiar with the overall plan, the annual action plans and the implications in terms of training and financial commitment.

It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors to ensure that the plan is being implemented, to monitor its progress and to evaluate its outcomes. This should be a standing item on the agenda at all board of governors meetings.



In order to meet its responsibilities the school must have written policies and plans which address the curricular and personal needs of the pupils and staff, and the board of governors must be familiar with these and monitor their progress.

Standards

The board of governors must ensure that the highest possible standards are being achieved by the pupils. Monitoring and evaluation of assessment outcomes, progress made as a school relative to other schools, targets set by the school and by individual curriculum leaders is an essential part of the work of the board of governors. Issues raised by inspection reports must be addressed and plans put in place to improve any areas highlighted. These plans must be discussed with and approved by the board of governors.

Finances

The board of governors is responsible for the efficient and effective use of the school budget and it must be conscious of its obligation to remain within DE's budgetary limitations.

A three year financial plan for the school must be drawn up by the board of governors in line with government funding to address the needs of the school. The board of governors must oversee the annual budget and make decisions accordingly. In particular, governors should ensure that any ear-marked funds

are used only for the purpose for which these funds have been allocated. Similarly, there should be clear indicators that the budget allocation for special needs and social deprivation are appropriately targeted. Staffing decisions, including appointments and redundancies, are a main consideration. Monitoring and reviewing the school salary policy is an ongoing necessity.

The budget should take account of the school development plan and any financial commitment associated with it.

Monitoring enrolment and admissions numbers is essential as it affects the budget allocation of the school. An annual audit of the school building and equipment should be carried out to ensure that health and safety regulations are being adhered to, appropriate maintenance is being carried out and that the school plant is being developed according to the needs of the pupils.

The school account should be audited and a summary report on it should be made available to the board of governors.

Complaints/Discipline

The board of governors must have clear policies and procedures in place to address issues of complaints against individuals, school policies or practices. These must be drawn up with reference to guidance from DE, CCMS and the ELB.



The board of governors must be involved in the monitoring of both staff and pupil attendance and be clear about how any difficulties are to be managed.

From time to time particular challenging events may present themselves to the board of governors of a school. These could include issues regarding staff behaviour, child protection or the sustainability of the school. In all instances reference should be made to CCMS which will provide the necessary advice and guidance to support the board of governors in dealing appropriately with such matters.

Legislation

The board of governors is responsible for ensuring that the school adjusts its policies and procedures to meet the requirements of any new legislation whether that involves management, curriculum or pastoral matters.

When significant changes of policy occur, DENI, CCMS or the ELB may present guidance to schools to support them with the necessary changes to their own internal policy documents.

Code of Conduct for a School Board of Governors

(Council for Catholic Maintained Schools)

This code sets out the expectations on and commitment required from school governors in order for the Board of Governors to properly carry out its work within the school and its community.

The Board of Governors has the following core strategic functions:

Establishing the strategic direction, by:

- Setting the vision, values, and objectives for the school.
- Agreeing the school improvement strategy with priorities and targets.
- Meeting statutory duties.

Ensuring accountability, by:

- Appointing the principal, vice-principal and all teaching staff in accordance with the scheme of employment for Catholic maintained schools.
- Monitoring progress towards targets.
- Performance managing the principal and vice-principal(s) and through delegation to the principal, the performance of all staff.
- Engaging with stakeholders.
- Contributing to school self-evaluation.
- Providing an annual report for parents.

Ensuring financial probity, by:

- Setting the budget.
- Monitoring spending against the budget.
- Ensuring the budget is managed effectively in the educational interest of the pupils of the school.
- Taking all necessary decisions to ensure the school budget remains within permitted DE limits and doing so in good time.
- Ensuring any risks to the financial viability of the school are managed.





As individuals on the Board of Governors we agree to the following:

Role & Responsibilities

- We understand the purpose of the board of governors and the role of the principal.
- We accept that we have no legal authority to act individually, except when the board has given us delegated authority to do so, and therefore we will only speak on behalf of the board of governors when we have been specifically authorised to do so.
- We accept collective responsibility for all decisions made by the board or its delegated agents. This means that we will not speak against majority decisions outside the board of governors' meetings.
- We accept that we will adhere to all matters of policy in accordance with the wishes of the senior trustees and employing authority of the school.
- We have a duty to act fairly and without prejudice, and in so far as we have responsibility for staff, we will fulfil all that is expected of us as governors.
- We will encourage open government and will act appropriately.
- We will consider carefully how our decisions may affect the wider community and other schools.
- We will always be mindful of our responsibility to maintain and develop the ethos and reputation of our school. Our actions within the school and the local community will reflect this.
- In making or responding to criticism or complaints affecting the school we will follow the procedures established by CCMS as the managing authority for the school.
- We will act as a supportive and challenging/critical friend to the principal.

Commitment

- We acknowledge that accepting office as a governor involves the commitment of significant amounts of time and energy.
- We will each involve ourselves actively in the work of the board of governors, and accept our fair share of responsibilities, including service on committees or working groups.
- We will make full efforts to attend all meetings and where we cannot attend we will notify the secretary of the board in good time.
- We will get to know the school well by responding to opportunities to involve ourselves in school activities, attending events and functions and reading policy documents, reports and other relevant information.
- We will visit the school, with all visits to school arranged in advance with the staff and undertaken within the framework established by the board of governors and agreed with the principal.
- We will consider seriously our individual and collective needs for training and development, and will undertake relevant training.

Relationships

- Governors should behave at all times in a manner which reflects the vision and ethos of their school and Catholic education.
- We will strive to work as a team in which constructive working relationships are actively promoted.
- We will express views openly, courteously and respectfully in all our communications with other governors and support agencies.
- We will support the chair in his/her role of ensuring appropriate conduct both at meetings and at all times.
- We will seek to develop effective working relationships



with the principal, staff and parents, the local authority and other relevant agencies and the community.

- We will ensure that the school maintains good relations with our neighbouring primary and post-primary schools particularly with respect to participation in the Area Learning Community.

Confidentiality

- We will observe complete confidentiality when matters are deemed confidential or where they concern specific members of staff or pupils, both inside or outside school
- School business should not be discussed outside of governor meetings but where this is necessary, we will exercise the greatest prudence.
- We will not reveal the details of any vote made by the board of governors.

Conflicts of interest

- We will record any pecuniary or other business interest (including those related to people we are connected with) that we have in connection with the board of

governors' business in a register of business interests, and if any such conflicted matter arises in a meeting we will offer to leave the meeting for the appropriate length of time.

- We will also declare any conflict of interest in any matters of business of the board including, for example, conflicts regarding the appointment of staff.
- We will act in the best interests of the school as a whole and not as a representative of any group, even if elected to the board of governors e.g. the parent governor is not a parent representative.

Breach of this code of conduct

- If we believe this code has been breached, we will raise this issue with the chair who will have the matter investigated. The board of governors will only seek removal as a last resort after seeking to resolve any difficulties or disputes.
- Should it be the chair that we believe has breached this code, another governor, such as the vice-chair will initiate the investigation.

The Seven Principles of Public Life

(The Nolan Principles)

As a board of governors we agreed that in exercising our responsibilities to the school we will be guided by the Nolan principles which are:



Selflessness

Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might seek to influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interest.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Annual Agenda for a School board of Governors



There are **administrative tasks** (for example, how meetings are run and reporting on child protection), **ongoing work** (for example, checking staff absence, checking monthly budget report) and **decision making tasks** which are carried out by Boards of Governors regularly throughout the year. The principal will consult and advise you and will place regular items on the agenda and as governors you may propose agenda items for your meetings. **(Refer to your CCMS Scheme of Management)**

The timetable which follows sets out some important tasks and decisions which governors and principals, working in partnership, need to address/take at various stages throughout the year.

The questions which appear later in the booklet are designed to assist you in taking timely and effective decisions and actions.

Autumn Term (September to Christmas)

- Review pupils' academic performance and other pupil related outcomes and set targets for the coming academic year.
- Monitor, evaluate and if necessary, review the school development plan, in particular the action plan for the coming year.
- Review enrolment and admissions criteria:
 - how many pupils have been admitted?
 - were there any difficulties in applying the criteria?
 - are the criteria fit for purpose?
 - do the criteria conform to CCMS and DE guidance?
 - do the criteria need to be amended?
- Carry out a staff and financial audit and relate this to enrolment and educational trends.
- Check need for staff changes or reductions/increases.
- Consider staff development needs and programme to

address these for all staff including the principal and non-teaching staff.

- Monitor child protection issues.
- Publish the "Board of Governors Annual Report to Parents."
- Identify training needs of governors and agree a programme for attendance at training.
- Carry out PRSD of principal and review salary of principal and vice-principal remembering the purpose and the implications of decisions taken including the requirements of the efficient discharge scheme.
- Review teacher attendance report.
- Review pupil attendance report.

Spring Term (Christmas to Easter)

- Monitor, evaluate and if necessary, review the school development plan and incorporate any adjustments required to annual plan.
- Report by principal and other senior/middle leaders responsible for the main elements of the annual plan.
- Review budget and continue planning for new financial year.
- Begin recruitment and selection of new staff if required.
- Begin to implement redundancy process if necessary.
- Monitor child protection issues.
- Carry out an inspection of school building including an audit of health and safety and maintenance priorities and discuss the written report in preparation for submission to CCMS.
- Review teacher attendance report.
- Review pupil attendance.

Summer Term (Easter to end of June)

- Report from principal and senior/middle leaders with responsibility for the spring term action plan within the school development plan.



- Examine internal and external data to evaluate school performance.
- Review the school's own assessment of progress, especially the progress of children who are underachieving, and the proposed strategies to address this underachievement.
- Monitor and evaluate school development plan and review priorities for next year.
- Complete recruitment and selection process if required.
- Complete redundancy process if required.
- Monitor child protection issues.
- Review enrolment trends and admissions criteria in preparation for submission of any revisions for the ELB admissions booklet.
- Monitor budget and discuss impact on next school year.
- Review audit of school accounts.
- Review teacher absence report for year and set revised targets.
- Review pupil absence report for year and set revised targets.
- Governor Reviewers draft review statement (PRSD).
- Review the maintenance and promotion of the Catholic Ethos in your school.
- Evaluate your performance as a Board of Governors.

The next section provides examples of the types of questions you may need to ask when you are acting as an **honest and challenging/critical** friend and are addressing each aspect of your job as a Governor.

Not all questions will apply to your phase of education (Nursery, Primary, post-primary) nor to the particular circumstances of your school.



How do Governors Deal With...

The areas for which questions have been suggested have been clustered in to six sections to simplify the work of the Governors.

1. Catholic Ethos – Review and evaluate how the work of the school ensures that each child fulfils his or her potential, is shaped by our Christian faith and how this is evident in our school.

2. School Development Planning – Check how well the School Development Plan (SDP) is being implemented through a discussion of reports from Principal and Senior Teachers. Monitor and evaluate the SDP and discuss priorities for next year.

3. Policy Review – Review of policies within the SDP.

4. Raising Standards and Providing Quality Education – Review children's academic performance and other outcomes impacting on the personal and social development of young people, and set targets for the new academic year.

5. Admissions and Enrolment – Review enrolment and admissions numbers and trends and any adjustments to admissions criteria.

6. Staffing and Finance – Carry out a staff and financial audit. Check the need for curricular change leading to new appointments and/or redundancies within the staff.

1. Catholic Ethos

In Catholic schools in Northern Ireland children's attainment exceeds the attainment of children in all other comparable sectors across primary and secondary education. This level of success has come about because of, and benefits from, the commitment of our staff and local communities to core Catholic values. This includes the manner in which we treat one another so that our children grow up in a culture of love and care. We are particularly concerned about addressing the needs of children who experience barriers to learning. Such concern is reflective of the ethos of our school system. The critical lead responsibility for this ethos lies with the governors and principal of the school supported by the local clergy and/or parish pastoral team.

Possible Questions

- How does our mission statement set out our values and



determine our ways of behaving towards each other?

- How do teachers and other members of staff encourage the children to accept these values and ways of behaving towards each other?
- What visible signs of our Catholic ethos are evident in our school?
- What opportunities have our children had to mix with and show respect for young people who are members of other communities including those of different faiths?
- In what ways can we ensure that children with special educational needs play a full part in the life of our school?
- How do we ensure that children from different ethnic backgrounds and their families are fully integrated into the life of our school?
- What opportunities have our children had to enable them to act with care and concern for others in our local and wider community?
- How do we encourage our children to grow in faith?
- To what extent does this school contribute to the educational provision in the area/community?
- How do we evaluate the effectiveness of our school as a Catholic school?

2. School Development Planning

Governors need to be satisfied that the school's priorities continue to be in line with statutory requirements, are appropriate to the needs of the school, have been planned for carefully and that improvement has occurred. Governors can check how well the SDP is being implemented through a discussion of reports from Senior Teachers.

Possible questions

- How was the SDP drawn up – were all members of the school community consulted including governors?

- What are the cost implications of the SDP including staffing, training, materials, equipment, and can these be accommodated within the three year budget plan?
- How does the SDP benefit from and/or contribute to collaboration with other schools through such things as the area learning community?
- How does the SDP benefit from and/or contribute to, the collaboration with community based bodies, with regard to issues such as improved parenting, healthy living and behaviour management?
- Can the staff member/s responsible for the main priority in the SDP discuss their action plan with us early in the year and update us at a later date as to how it is meeting its criteria?
- At the end of the year can these staff members report to us on how the plan has achieved its objectives and what has been learned by staff with a view to informing future planning?
- If targets are not being met or Action Plans not being implemented can the Principal or staff members explain why is this so?

3. Policy Review

As there is significant and ongoing change in central education policy, schools have found it helpful to have a planned programme of review for their most important policies. Schools must take account of all new developments in curricular and pastoral requirements and reflect these in their policies.

Possible questions

- Are all statutory and necessary policies in place and up-to-date?
- Could the principal identify the policies which the governors are obliged to adopt and review each year?



- Can the principal give the order in which the policies need to be reviewed to give us time to read over and understand them before starting to work on them?
- How can we as governors be sure that a policy is being followed by all relevant staff?
- Could the teacher responsible for the policy area report on its implementation?
- If a policy is to be redrafted could the teacher who has responsibility for that area be requested to explain to the governors why and what changes are being suggested

4. Raising Standards – providing quality education

Helping the children to achieve academically as well as socially is an important part of school life. As governors, you will want to be familiar with how the children are performing. Schools have a range of information which will allow you to examine current performance and set targets for improvement. When examining performance it is important to note the make-up of the group of children being assessed e.g. the number of children with special needs or English as a second language may affect the percentages.

Possible questions

- Taking each subject/curriculum area/phase – what were our school's targets? Were they sufficiently challenging, appropriate, too simple or too demanding?
- Did the children do better in some subjects compared to others and if so, why?
- How did our school perform compared to other schools with a similar social profile and size?
- How are young people in receipt of free school meals performing relative to the school and other schools

in similar circumstances, and what actions are being taken to improve outcomes?

- Looking at the trends in the scores over a four year period, if there are significant differences what is the explanation for this?
- Can a member of the senior management team and/or co-ordinator/head of department report on how the school plans to address the further improvement in the children's scores next year?
- What is being done to support our children with special educational needs, our low achievers, our under – achievers and those who are gifted and talented?
- How is our school's collaboration with other schools contributing to the opportunities for our pupils?
- When was the school last inspected and what were the follow-up implications of that inspection?
- When will the school next be due to be inspected? How are we preparing for that?
- How can we improve the attendance of both staff and pupils?
- How can we lower suspension/expulsion rates?

5. Admissions and Enrolment

As governors you will need to examine the pupil enrolment trends over a three to five year period. This will provide you with information about the likely future size of the school and whether the number of pupils is stable or is showing signs of rising or falling. This may have implications for the future viability of the school and/or the level of collaboration with other schools in the area. Admissions criteria are designed to allow you as governors to give parents advice on whether their child may get a place in your school. They can also be used to compile a rank order list of children who will be offered a place in your school each September.

Possible questions

- What is our enrolment number, what does this mean and how is it calculated?
- What is our admissions number, what does this mean and how is it calculated?
- How will these numbers impact on the school's ability to accommodate the children who are likely to apply for places in September?
- What are the current and future enrolment trends of our school?
- What impact will these trends have on the school and the services it provides for the local community?
- Have our criteria allowed us to enrol fairly in the previous year?
- Do our criteria enable parents seeking to enrol their child in their parish primary school, to have a reasonable expectation that their child will be offered a place?
- Do our criteria allow us to clearly identify the last child in our rank order?
- Do we have difficulty accommodating the children of local families? If so, what action can we take?
- Do our admissions criteria take into account the needs of the area in which the school is situated?



- Do our admissions criteria respect the neighbouring schools and their traditional catchment areas?
- Do our criteria clearly identify children who may return to school post-16?
- How can our criteria help local children access the Entitlement Framework in collaboration with other post- primary schools?
- What guidance on setting criteria is available from DE, CCMS, ELB, – have we followed it?

6. Staffing and Finance

Each school is given an annual budget to fund all costs and activities. Just as any business needs to run efficiently and within budget, so do schools. Governors must carefully consider staff costs to ensure that the school can afford to retain, increase or reduce staff. A useful way of keeping track of expenditure is to carry out an annual audit. There is a strong link between the actual enrolment of a school and its budget allocation.

Possible questions

- Is our SDP supported by a robust financial plan?
- Are the monthly budget reports in line with the agreed budget plan?
- Does the financial plan identify how ear-marked funds are being used for the intended purpose?
- Does the financial plan clearly show that special needs and social deprivation funding streams are being appropriately extended?
- Could the principal explain the staff audit to the governors?
- What part will we play in putting together the financial audit?
- Is our school moving towards a deficit or surplus situation over the next three years?
- Is this school sustainable into the future in line with DE policy?
- What steps must we take to ensure that our school has neither a budget deficit nor a surplus beyond 5% or £75,000?
- How can we ensure that any surplus is used for the benefit of our pupils?
- How can the governors and staff make application to access additional funds so as to enhance the school's budget?
- What use have we made of advice from CCMS and the ELB?
- Is there a robust system in place to account for and audit any additional school – based accounts or funds, for example, extended schools funding?
- What is the amount of such funding, how is it being used and what impact it is having on standards?
- Is the school account audited annually?
- Can we have an annual summary statement of this account?



Conclusion

The role of a school governor, whilst sometimes demanding, is an extremely rewarding and fulfilling activity. It requires that you have a fully informed picture of all aspects of your school. As part of the governing body, you will have the opportunity to help shape the destiny of the school by supporting and challenging those charged with delivering the curriculum. Good governance, which ensures that the educational and personal experiences provided by the school are of the highest standard, makes a positive difference to the life chances of the children. It helps raise aspirations and achievements, and indeed contributes to their enjoyment of school.



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