

## 05 Student Governors (England)

### Who are the governors?

The governing body of a school is made up of volunteers from the community, Local council, staff and parents. The make up of the governors depends on what type of school you attend.

The role of the governing body is to set the direction of the school by taking responsibility for many aspects of school life such as behaviour, appointment of staff and finances.

The governing body meet regularly, and have the power to exert real change in school.

### What about the pupils?

Since September 1<sup>st</sup> 2003, under-18 year olds have been able to become associate governors of schools. This means that you can sit on your school, or another schools governing body.

An associate governor is appointed to the governing body because they are adding specific skills concerning certain issues and as a student governor you are an expert on what it's like to be a pupil!

### What do they do?

Student governors work with the governing body to support and develop all areas of the school. This involves attending governors meetings and committees. These structures are similar to the school council structures; the full governing body meetings have a chair and secretary, and create subcommittees to investigate and develop solutions to certain issues, for example behaviour, school improvement or bullying. Becoming a student governor means you are at the heart of decision making and responsibility for the school.

**Cheadle Hulme College** in Stockport has an effective school council, whose members can become student governors. Year 9 student governor Kieron Barnes is enthusiastic about his position: "Being an associate governor is all about representing the students on the governing body. I think having students on the governing body gives a more

democratic atmosphere. In other words – everybody has their say." Kieron's impression of the result of associate governors reflects the school's overarching strategy of Student Voice.

Emma Bates, also from year 9, attends the governors' meetings and the teaching and learning committee, where issues from the school council are raised. Emma sees the value of student governors as an opportunity for: "the governors to get an insight into what goes on from a student's perspective." After all, as Emma points out: "who knows the school better than the students?!"

As student governors are under 18, they are not part of the *body corporate*, meaning that they are not legally responsible for the school the way other governors are. Associate governors are not allowed to vote on decisions concerning admissions, appointment of governors, pupil discipline or the budget and financial commitments of the governing body. If an associate governor is under 18 at the time of their appointment, they cannot vote at all. It is still worth becoming an associate governor – your advice and ideas directly influence other governors' decisions.

**Hanham High School** in Bristol has key stage 4 and 5 representatives from the school council as student governors. The students attend full governors meetings, and committee meetings. They are asked for their views on specific areas of the meeting agenda.

Headteacher Peggy Farrington reports an unforeseen spin-off - increased governor attendance, more dynamic meetings and the improved governor contribution at the meetings – "I feel that governors are anxious to show the students that their work is important and that they are doing a good job!"

### First Steps

If you want to embed pupil participation and student voice into the running of your school by having student governors, take the time to think through the following issues:

### Is your school council effective?

To have successful student governors

#### School Councils UK

108-110 Camden High Street,  
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# School Councils UK

## Activity Guide

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it essential to have an effective school council. If there are strong systems in place of consultation, discussion, action and feedback in the school, the better chance there is of student governors being practiced enough in participation and relaying information back and forth between staff and students.

#### **Consult with pupils, parents, staff and governors**

Developing student voice in school affects everyone that has a connection with the school. These groups of people should therefore be consulted about new directions. Your school council is well placed to communicate with the whole school community.

#### **Check status of the governing board**

The governing body has to agree to appoint student governors in order for them to become a possibility in school. The governing body will have to reconstitute to include associate members. For more information on reconstituting the governors, contact your local LEA.

#### **Create a plan of Associate Membership**

After consultations and meeting with the governing body, you should develop a plan of how student governors are going to work in your school; for example:

- How are student governors appointed?
- Which year group are student governors from?
- How long will the student governors serve?
- Does anybody need any support or training?
- What is the student governors' relationship and feedback to the school council and the wider student body like?
- How are adult governors going to react to student governors?
- Which governors meetings shall the students attend when they start?

- How do student governors fit into a wider strategy of pupil participation?
- What does the school need from the LEA?

#### **Keeping it going**

Taking responsibility for school is often hard and tiring- ask your governors about how exciting their meetings usually are!

Communicate to the rest of the school what goes on in governors meetings. The topics raised there can really draw attention to your school council, and give a range of challenges for the council to tackle.

The following actions can help you keep up the good work as a student governor:

- Assigning one governor to take responsibility for linking the governing body and the school council
- Regular meetings between the school council and the whole governing body, or one committee
- 'School council matters' included as a standing item on governing body agendas with a
- presentation of recent business by pupil councillors as a matter of course
- 'Governor matters' included as a standing item on school council agendas
- School council members being given observer status on governing body meetings.

To be a great student governor, remember there are other schools out there trying to boost student voice like you. Getting in touch with schools in your area to share resources, stories and advice can really improve participation in your school.

More information on the role of governors can be found at <http://www.governornet.co.uk>