

## **How to get the right people around the table**

Recruitment and retention are arguably two of the biggest challenges facing most governing boards. Whether we are making a decision about filling a vacancy now or are succession planning for the type of person we might need in the future, it is important for governors to evaluate the knowledge, skills and experience we already have across the board as well as considering whether everyone around the table is being utilised to the best of their ability. Strong and effective governance is a core component of school improvement so investing in the development of governors will inevitably have a positive impact on the board, the school and the wider community.

How do we find the right people? Looking at our existing skills in line with the DfE competency framework for governance is a good starting point. Carrying out an analysis of skills audits, training needs, performance and induction will provide an overview of current capacity and will help to identify whether there is a skills shortage in a particular area or across the board.

My experience of working with governing boards across the West Midlands has shown that you are far more likely to attract the right person if you have good channels of communication and/or advertising in place to make people aware of the opportunity to become a governor or trustee at your school. It also helps if your recruitment and induction process is clear and uncomplicated. Prospective governors are often considering by more than one school so once you have identified a potentially good match it is important to move quickly!

There are free online recruitment sources that can help you to find potential candidates, such as Governors for Schools, Do It, Inspiring Governance and Academy Ambassadors. Sometimes the most effective way of finding the right person can be to compile a wish list of the qualities you are looking for and then target local businesses, chambers of commerce, or local colleges and universities. In doing so, it is important to ensure that the person you are approaching will be motivated to become a governor for the right reasons. It is also important to promote the message that being a school governor can be inspiring, rewarding and fulfilling and that good governance has the ability to transform the lives of others.

Having found a potential candidate, it is essential to invite them into school for an interview. This will not only allow you to ensure that the candidate is the best possible match for the board, it will also provide the candidate with the opportunity to ask questions about the school and to make an informed decision about joining the governing board. Prior to appointment some boards invite the candidate to observe a governing board or committee meeting so that they can view governance in action before making a commitment.

Before making a recommendation to the board about the suitability of the candidate, it is good practice to take up references so as to obtain someone else's view of their character, reliability and trustworthiness.

Retention is also a critical factor in ensuring that we have the right people around the table. Whilst new recruits are vital to having a good mix of skills and experience across the board, retaining our best governors and trustees is equally important. Where retention is a strength of the board, governors feel suitably supported and

equipped to carry out their role through the range of continuous professional development opportunities afforded to them and through the positive contribution they are able to make to the team. Conversely, where there is a steady turnover of governors, there are commonly issues with time commitment, poor quality of induction, or that 'being a governor is not what I thought it was going to be'. Retention can also be an issue in respect of ineffective governors or trustees who make a limited contribution and who essentially act as 'seat fillers'. In this regard, having the right people around the table is essential in terms of holding each other to account for the overall effectiveness of the board.

The National Governance Association (NGA) have set out 8 elements of effective governance which they feel covers the right skills/right people around the table. This includes having an understanding of roles and responsibilities, good chairing, professional clerking, good relationships based on trust, knowing the school – data, staff, parents, pupils and community, having a commitment to asking challenging questions, and having the confidence to hold courageous conversations in the interests of children and young people. Time spent making sure that we get the right person is time well spent indeed.

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