



# School Governorship for Disabled People



This guide is aimed at disabled people interested  
in becoming school governors.

# Introduction

**Being disabled should not be a barrier to becoming a school governor. In fact, schools and colleges can benefit from the skills and life experiences disabled people bring to the governing body.**

This information pack is designed to encourage disabled people to take up the opportunities available to them to become school governors. The intention is that this pack will bust some of the myths surrounding what school governors do and any perceived barriers disabled people may have to getting involved.

The pack is made up of two sections providing information on the support that disabled people can receive to find school governor roles:

Section 1: Finding a School Governor's post  
Section 2: School Governor 'myth and reality'

Section 1 - Governors for Schools, (SGOSS) have a fantastic process in place which will help support disabled people to find school governor posts. This section will explain this process and how to access the support available, including a telephone helpline.

Section 2 - Stephen Brookes, Chair of the Public Appointments project group, writes passionately about his experiences when he was a school governor in Blackpool.

We hope you find this pack useful.

# Section 1: Finding a School Governor's post

**Governors for Schools, (SGOSS) have implemented a fantastic process to support disabled people to find school governor posts more easily. This includes working with schools to match potential governors to the posts available. Below you will find the process to finding a governorship post.**

## The SGOSS Process

A member of the SGOSS team will be available to support you through the following steps:

1. You can complete the SGOSS online application form [using this link](#).

*If you have problems completing the form a member of the SGOSS team will be available to help. Please call 020 7354 9805.*

*It is important that you provide details of your disability and include information about the additional support required.*

2. You will receive an acknowledgement of receipt of your application.
3. Your skills and experience will be matched with a school's requirements and your details forwarded to the appropriate contact.
4. In most cases you will be invited to visit the school and meet the Chair and Head Teacher.

*This is the time to raise any concerns you have and discuss any additional support you may require.*

5. If you are offered the opportunity to join the governing body but do not feel the school is right you can decline the offer at this stage.

*SGOSS will continue to look for other opportunities for you.*

6. If you are happy to accept the offer the appointment is likely to be ratified at the next full governing body meeting.

*Following your appointment SGOSS will continue to provide ongoing support – induction pack, governor network events (in some areas), relevant links to issues relating to governance, website.*

## Virtual Governor Meetings

Due to a change in legislation governors in maintained schools can attend and vote at meetings “virtually” provided this is agreed by the full governing body.

*“Governing bodies have a vital role and it is crucial that they are able to recruit people with the necessary skills to create effective governance. I see skills as more important than physical proximity, so if schools need to look beyond their immediate community to find the calibre of people they need, then they should be encouraged to do so. Legislation now allows maintained school governors to attend and vote at meetings ‘virtually’; academy trusts are free to determine their own arrangements. This means that the proposals you set out are a legitimate means of exploring whether ‘virtual’ governors can help to address key skills gaps.”*

**Lord Nash, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Schools.**

This may be of particular interest to disabled volunteers and SGOSS can provide further information on how this works for the school and the volunteer.

## Section 2: School Governor ‘myth and reality’



**Stephen Brookes is a disabled person, and was a school governor at a high school and Performing Arts College for two 3 years terms.**

**Below is his account of his experience.**

School governance is the most important volunteering role in education, but society's views, or indeed stereotypes, of this vital group of people could not be more backward. The result is that one in 8 governor posts are currently vacant, with the shortfall as high as one in four in some schools in rural and deprived areas.

If anyone cares about their local school, and the future of our children, then becoming a school governor is a very rewarding and exciting thing to do, so it is important to take every opportunity to stress the dedication, professionalism and passion that so many of our school governors demonstrate, and to stress the amazing opportunities that come with the role of the modern school governor in 2015.

The need to include people from all backgrounds in governorship is of paramount importance in our diverse society, and the inclusion of disabled people is vital, so we need to consider, and overcome a few myths and misunderstandings in the process of improving levels of appointment of disabled people as school governors.

The findings of a recent poll, which involved 1,781 UK residents, discovered that 61 per cent of people didn't realise that school governors appoint head teachers and 76 per cent did not know that they decide admissions policies for state maintained schools.

Furthermore, 85 per cent had no idea they sign off a school's budget, while 95 per cent did not know they allocated budgets for new buildings.

Some even suggested that the role of governors is one of fête organisers and fundraisers, who will willingly spend a weekend painting the new school reception area, but play no real role in running the place. And even some senior school staff feed the confusion. One respondent said - 'It won't take up too much of your time,' my children's genial primary head teacher reassured me as he co-opted me onto the governing body. "Just one meeting per term, and leave the rest to the professionals" – or words to that effect.

More common myths which emerged were:

1. *The Head teacher will do what he or she wants anyway.*

No, they have to listen and comply with governance. It's up to the governors to make the head listen.

2. *Politics, there's always politics.*

Yes. But governors need to be apolitical when in post.

3. *The lingering risk of being grilled and then embarrassed by some legal proceedings or other.*

Full training, advice and support is available in legal matters, and advice on enforceable decisions is made before any such actions occur.

4. *There are few influential things to do.*

No, key appointments, policies and safeguarding are all part of governance. Involvement can be at the level the governor wishes.

5. *Plenty of downsides, few ups.*

No. Success is a real bonus and sharing in awards and pupil activities where appropriate are enjoyable.

6. *All in all: it's little more than a talking shop.*

No. Its talking with outcomes.

7. *Disabled people are there purely to advise on access and building suitability.*

Absolutely not. There is a real need to use the experience of disabled people in creating anti bullying policies; understanding of difference; and even become involved in staff awareness.

A governing body can work well where it has strong leadership and real decision making power. There are certain critical actions including the fact a governing body can change the culture of a school through appointments, in particular that of head teacher.

Governance works well when there is a feeling of collaboration, and understanding - working as a team. Decisions are not made by individual governors, but by the whole team with everyone able to contribute their own view. I feel that the task of the chair is very much to facilitate that process, and not leave anyone feeling they have been ignored, isolated or excluded. A sense of humour in that process can be most helpful!

Becoming a governor is very much a matter of taking the initiative to make of the post what you feel is right for you. It is not paid, but it is also not prescriptive. There is a huge responsibility, but the team of governors are there to overview and sanction the decisions proposed by the management team. It is a way of sharing responsibility so it does not fall entirely upon one person, or a small team. The governance team also provides a way to bring a wide range of different skills and experiences to the school.

The management of a school is vastly improved if it draws on the skills and experiences of people outside the educational establishment. It brings greater balance, particularly in political ideology. Also, it often gives the school a competence in areas such as financial/property planning, HR, project management and community relations which it wouldn't necessarily have if it was run solely by teachers/administrators.

Stephen Brookes MBE

This pack has been developed by the [Disability Action Alliance 'Public Appointments'](#) project group, in conjunction with [Governors for Schools, \(SGOSS\)](#). Published in December 2015, this project was led by Stephen Brookes of the [Disability Hate Crime Network](#).

The Disability Action Alliance is an alliance of organisations with an interest or specialist knowledge in disability.