Skills and Attributes required to be an effective Governor

Volunteers can bring many competencies that will be useful to a governing board. Some of these stem from education such as knowledge of the techniques and strategies used to measure teaching quality, pupil progress and attainment, and special needs. Business or professional skills are also of value to governing boards: financial management and accountancy; organisational change management; legal; human resources; property and estates management; procurement and contracting services; project management; equal opportunities; quality assurance and service improvement; risk management; health and safety; marketing and public relations; ICT; creativity.

Three core functions of a governing board:

1. Ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.
2. Holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the performance management of staff.
3. Overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent.

As well as carrying out the three core functions, governors and trustees must be prepared to adopt the seven principles of public life – the Nolan principles.

1. Selflessness – Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
2. Integrity – Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
3. Objectivity – Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
4. Accountability – Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
5. Openness – Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
6. Honesty – Holders of public office should be truthful.
7. Leadership – Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

In addition, some essential attributes of good governors are:

- Committed – devoting the required time and energy to the role and being ambitious to achieve the best possible outcomes for young people. Prepared to give time, skills and knowledge to developing themselves and others in order to create highly effective governance.
- Confident – of an independent mind, able to lead and contribute to courageous conversations, to express opinions and to play an active role on the board.

- Curious – possessing an enquiring mind and an analytical approach. Understanding the value of meaningful questioning.
- Challenging – providing appropriate challenge to the status quo, not taking information or data at face value and always seeking to improve things.
- Collaborative – prepared to listen to and work in partnership with others and understanding the importance of building strong working relationships within the board and with executive leaders, staff, parents and carers, pupils, the local community and employers.
- Critical – understanding the value of critical friendship which enables challenge and support. Self-reflective, pursuing learning and development opportunities to improve their own and whole board effectiveness.
- Creative – able to challenge conventional wisdom and be open-minded about new approaches to problem-solving. Recognising the value of innovation and creative thinking to organisational development and success.

Skills and experience

Essential:

- Critical listening and the ability to ask effective questions
- Strategic thinking
- Excellent communication
- Problem solving and analysis

Desirable:

- Understanding of data
- HR experience
- Finance/Accounting
- Knowledge of education
- Leadership and management
- Risk management
- Legal expertise, particularly knowledge of charity law
- Marketing and communications