

Great Torrington School – Becoming a Parent Governor

Are you interested in becoming a Parent Governor? If you are you may like some background details that could help in allowing you to make up your mind whether you wish to apply or not.

When a vacancy occurs we will contact all our parents to alert you that we are calling for volunteers. Any parent with a child in full-time education at GTS is eligible to apply. However, there are a couple of points that would prevent election and some of them are:

- Being an employee of GTS Academy Trust Ltd
- If employed by Devon County Council your election would take the total number of Governors on the GTS Board who are employed by the Local Authority above a legally set maximum.
- If you have been convicted of certain offences
- If you are bankrupt
- If you fail any safeguarding checks

As far as the terms and conditions for being on the Governing Body are concerned the 'Code of Practice for Academy School Governors' covers much of the legal side of an individual Governor's responsibilities. In addition the following points are relevant:

- GTS is an Academy and is run by the GTS Academy Trust Ltd. There are 5 Members on the Trust Board who are also Directors of the company, as are all the other Governors. Although there is no legal requirement for Governors to be Directors, nor do Directors have to be Governors, it was decided on changing to Academy status that all Governors would also become Directors of the company.
- Being an Academy means that we are no longer responsible to Devon County Council other than for the provision of a secondary phase school for the community's children. The Trust owns the school land and buildings, indeed we achieved that when we became a Foundation school several years before we changed to Academy status.
- An Academy, in our case Converter Academy, is still a maintained school and receives public money in the same way and at the same rate as those schools that are still run by the County Council; this is highlighted because references to 'maintained schools' can often be misconstrued to imply that an Academy is not one, NB a Converter Academy is not in the fee-paying private sector. A Converter Academy remains akin to a Local Authority (LA) school in that it is not sponsored by a commercial company or interest group, ie faith.
- We are responsible directly to the Department for Education (DfE) for the success of our curriculum in enabling pupil achievement to meet the national standards; also for how we spend our allocated funding.
- We remain liable for inspection under Ofsted and on the last occasion we maintained our 'Good' assessment. We are currently introducing an innovative programme that should allow us to strengthen those areas where an improvement would allow us to achieve an 'Outstanding' at our next inspection.
- Our Governing Body is not a talking shop. It is a vibrant grouping that challenges the Headteacher, Senior Leadership Team and all staff members against measurable standards while supporting and encouraging everyone in not only achieving but exceeding those standards. Individual Governors are linked with a department and are encouraged to get involved. It is appreciated that work comes first but there are many opportunities for a Governor to be in school during the working day; it is after all the best way in seeing for yourself how well

the school is being run, how the pupils behave and how we are meeting the challenge of providing the wherewithal to enable the teachers to achieve their targets and the pupils their grades.

- We currently have four committees; the Full Governing Body (FGB) of which every Governor is a member, the Curriculum Committee, the Finance Committee and the Premises Committee. It is not compulsory to belong to one of the three specialist committees but it is encouraged. This helps spread the load and provides a better chance for a committee to be quorate if an individual member cannot attend a meeting.
- We hold meetings involving Governors at 5pm, but the FGB meeting is preceded by a briefing at 4.30pm on some topic of interest, usually provided by members of the teaching staff.
- Governors are also invited to sit on panels. There are occasions, fortunately they are rare, when an incident requires an investigation that is followed by the Governing Body having to make a decision on the way ahead. This is usually achieved with three Governors sitting to hear the case after which they make a decision on a course of action. In the case of a pupil the Governing Body has the final say and, as the employer of the school's staff members, it has the responsibility for maintaining safety, standards, good order and discipline; in other words we can no longer pass our problems up the line for the LA to decide what to do.
- There are courses that Governors can take in order to be better placed to carry out their responsibilities. Some courses can be attended in person and there are many others that are computer based (Governor Electronic Learning - GEL) that can be taken at personal convenience.
- GTS holds many interesting events, ie concerts, sports fixtures, talent contest etc, to which Governors are encouraged to attend. It is appropriate for both parents and pupils to see the school Governors taking an active part in events and besides, they are usually great fun and show our commitment to the school.
- The Governing Body is a Gold Member of the National Governors Association (NGA) and each Governor receives a regular email newsletter. We also subscribe to the Babcock/LDP governor support service (formerly run by DCC) and they run events and workshops that we can attend. Finally we hold membership of the Devon Association of Governors (DAG) and, similar to the NGA, receive regular newsletters and information on events.
- A Governor is usually elected for a four year period. If, as a Parent Governor, your child graduates before your period of office is due to end, you are entitled to serve to the end of your normal appointment. Unless you have another child admitted into GTS, you would not be eligible to stand again as a Parent Governor.

As I am sure you will appreciate we were pleased that Ofsted continued to assess GTS as a Good school with some Outstanding aspects. As already mentioned we are working on getting ourselves into a position for the next inspection to move us up to the top grade. I am pleased to be able to tell you that we have a splendid cohort of pupils who in turn are supported by some outstanding teachers. They are determined to push the teaching and learning boundaries in order to allow each and every pupil to achieve their full potential. That said we are striving to continue to improve in all areas and the Governing Body is an integral part in enabling both staff and, most importantly, the pupils to do better.

The current Governing Body is made up of great people from a wide variety of backgrounds. If you wish to join us then please submit your name for inclusion in the election process. If in the meantime you have any specific questions you would like answering, please do not hesitate in addressing them to our Clerk.