



# **Guidance for the Election of Parent Governors in Controlled Schools**

**School Governance Service**

**School Governance Service  
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## **Guidance for the Election of Parent Governors in Controlled Schools**

### **Boards of Governors for the Term of Office 2024 – 2028**

The Department of Education (DE) Circular No. 2023/17 outlines the legal position and arrangements that would meet with DE approval governing the election of parent governors. (In law the term parent includes a guardian and any person who has the actual custody of the pupil).

Please refer to the DE [Membership of Boards of Governors](#) document for the number of parent governors.

*Find outlined below a sample procedure which you may wish to adopt.*

#### **A. Invitation to Participate in an Election**

1. The Board of Governors should designate a person (other than a parent) to act as clerk to the election. The clerk shall write to parents to invite them to participate in the election of a parent governor(s) and inform them of the procedures to be used for nominating candidates and voting. A sample letter (see Appendix A) and reply slip (see Appendix A1) are attached.
2. All eligible parents (parent governors must be elected by parents of pupils registered at the school at the time of the election) are entitled to nominate candidates, to vote and to stand for election. Each parent, regardless of the number of their children at the school, is entitled to vote for as many candidates as there are places to fill. Candidates are eligible to vote.
3. Please note, in accordance with the Scheme for the Management of Controlled Schools; Page 8 Disqualification from Membership Paragraph 6 (1) states:

*“A person, other than the principal or a teacher elected in accordance with the relevant provisions of Schedule 4 to the 1986 Order, who is employed for gain solely in the school for the purposes of the school or, for the purposes of non-school activities; shall not be a member of the Board of Governors of the school.”*

4. In the information distributed to parents it should be made clear that nominations for vacancies that exist must be proposed and seconded by parents of pupils registered at the school at the time of election and have the agreement of the nominated person(s). Parents should seek permission from any candidates they wish to nominate, before submitting the nomination.

## **B. Seeking Nominations**

5. When a vacancy for parent governor arises, the clerk should send a letter (Appendix A) or email, to all parents informing them of the vacancy and inviting applications for the role of parent governor. The school should send this correspondence to each contact or email address for those listed as having parental responsibility. If the school does not have an email address for each of those persons, then a letter should be sent via post.

Parents interested in standing as parent governor should be informed that they need to complete and submit the Candidate Nomination Form (Appendix B) and the Personal Statement form (Appendix B1), outlining their skills, knowledge and experience, by a specific date (normally 10 school days from the time the letter/email was sent out from the school). The actual closing date and time should be clearly stated so that parents are aware of the timescale to submit their application. Following this second letter should be sent to parents advising them of the number of nominations received and the next steps.

The Personal Statement of each candidate will be sent with the Ballot Paper, to all those entitled to vote.

This information can be collated for circulation, but care must be exercised to ensure that personal data contained in other parts of the Nomination Form is not disclosed and compliance with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

6. Those standing for election must have their Nomination Form (Appendix B) signed by the proposer and seconder and should confirm their acceptance of a candidacy.
7. The nominated person(s) should complete the Personal Statement (Appendix B1) to outline their range of knowledge, skills and experience and describe their commitment to the values and ethos of the school, for example:

***Commitment to Children and Young People:*** *experience of working or volunteering with children and young people, demonstrate involvement with your local community, knowledge or understanding of the Education system in Northern Ireland, demonstrate a commitment to improving education for all pupils.*

***Interpersonal Skills:*** *have effective communication skills - including tact and diplomacy, the ability to maintain confidentiality, to work as part of a team taking collective responsibility for decision making, to develop and maintain co-operative working relationships, to question, support and challenge.*

***General Experience:*** *experience of planning and organising, of having attended and contributed to meetings, of leading or managing people, of change management, of involvement in recruitment processes or human resource matters, of dealing with or managing legal issues.*

***Financial / Numerical Skills and Experience:*** *have the ability to understand financial information and reports, to analyse statistical/numerical information, to contribute to problem-solving and/or have budget management experience.*

### **C. The Ballot, Voting and Scrutiny**

8. If the number of candidates is equal to, or fewer than, the number of parent governor places to be filled, all candidates should be deemed to have been elected, without the need for a vote. The clerk should record the process of appointment on the [Outcome of Parent Governor Election](#) and return it to the Education Authority (EA).
9. If the number of candidates is equal to, or less than, the number of places to be filled by parents, all candidates should be deemed to have been elected.
10. Where there are more candidates than places to be filled, a ballot shall be carried out using the sample Ballot Paper (Appendix C). The clerk will issue ballot papers to all eligible parents after the closing date for applications. The approach selected to conduct the election – Parent Meeting, Postal Ballot or Electronic Method, will determine how the ballot is managed. Ballot papers circulated by post or electronic means should be returned to school by a designated date and time, usually 10 school days after the ballot was sent out.
11. After the ballot has closed, the clerk should count the votes in the presence of at least two witnesses. The candidates should be invited to scrutinise the count, although the process should not be delayed if any of the candidates are unable to be present. The clerk should determine whether a spoiled voting paper is valid and have a mechanism in place to ensure that each voter submits one completed ballot only. A simple majority should determine the successful candidate(s).
12. Where a ballot results in a tie, a further ballot may be held involving only those candidates involved in the tie. If this second ballot also produces a tie, then the result should be determined by lot.

13. After an election is held and a number of vacancies remain unfilled, please contact the EA School Governance Service – [govsupport@eani.org.uk](mailto:govsupport@eani.org.uk) for further advice.

The voting records should be retained securely by the school for the term of office.

## **D. Conducting the Vote**

### **Conducting Election During Parent Meeting**

14. The clerk should ensure that a Letter of Invitation, a Reply Slip, Nomination Forms and Personal Statement Forms (see Appendices A, A1, B and B1), together with information on the Roles and Responsibilities of Boards of Governors (Appendix D) are issued to parents at least seven days before the date of the meeting. All parents of pupils registered at the school at the time of the election are entitled to be present.

### **Admission to the Meeting**

15. This meeting is a meeting of parents, and the clerk should ensure that only parents of pupils registered at the school are invited to attend and to vote at the meeting.
16. Each school should, in the light of its own circumstances, determine a realistic quorum for the meeting. For example, a quorum for a meeting to elect parent governors could be double the number of parent governors to be elected, i.e. if there are 2 representatives the quorum should be 4 parents present at the meeting.
17. In the event that too few eligible parents attend to reach the agreed quorum, the meeting cannot proceed. The Board of Governors should decide what further steps it might reasonably take. For example, the school might re-arrange the meeting, arrange a postal vote (see point 21) or hold an electronic ballot (see points 24 - 28).

In the event that any of the above arrangements does not reach an outcome the clerk should contact the EA School Governance Service – [govsupport@eani.org.uk](mailto:govsupport@eani.org.uk) for further advice.

### **Procedure at the Meeting**

18. At the commencement of the meeting the clerk should normally act as chair and explain the purpose of the meeting. Those present should be informed of the requisite number of parent governors to be elected at the meeting.
19. The chair should then inform those present of the nomination(s) received for parent governor positions. Any questions with regard to the functions of the Board of Governors should be answered and all discussions ended before voting commences.
20. In order to encourage the attendance of parents, the meeting should be well publicised and might be arranged to coincide with another event that is open to all parents.

### **Conducting Elections by Post**

21. If the election is to be conducted by post, the clerk should first examine all nominations received and confirm that those parents who have been nominated are prepared to stand. If the number of candidates is equal to, or fewer than, the number of places to be filled, all candidates should be deemed to have been elected, without the need for a vote.
22. Where there are more nominees than places to be filled, a postal ballot should be held. The requisite number of ballot papers should be prepared and validated, for example, by impression or distinctive endorsement of the school stamp. Each eligible parent should receive one ballot paper together with explanatory notes and the Personal Statement of each candidate (see Appendix B1). A final date for the



return of the ballot papers should be indicated, normally 10 school days after the original correspondence regarding the ballot was sent out, and candidates should be invited to scrutinise the count (see section C, point 11).

23. It is understood that on some occasions prior to previous elections, ballot papers have been sent home with the pupils. This is not a satisfactory practice, and it is therefore recommended that the ballot papers should either be handed directly to the parents, for example at a meeting or posted to them. Once completed, the election papers should be sealed and either hand delivered by the parents or returned to the school by post.

### **Conducting Elections using Electronic Methods**

24. Schools should ensure that those parents who cannot participate in the election process electronically, or would prefer not to use electronic communication, are able to vote using an alternative method.
25. Schools should have robust verification measures in place to ensure that they have the correct contact details of all parents eligible to vote and that the process is completely confidential. School authorities and schools should also ensure that electronic voting methods used for such elections are compliant with the requirements of the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. The school should have permission from all parents to use their email addresses for this purpose.

### **Suggested Approaches**

This guidance provides three different suggested electronic approaches for schools to consider.

## **Approach One**

### **26. Email attachment system**

The method uses many of the existing elements of the Postal Voting system above. A dedicated school email address should be used to issue ballot papers and parents should return completed ballot papers as an email attachment. This will enable them to be printed, stored separately, remain anonymous and be counted manually.

As both parents have the entitlement to vote, the school will require the email addresses of both parents not just one parent of a pupil.

## **Approach Two**

### **27. Mail Merge System and use of online survey tool**

A mail merge process is used to issue ballot papers and is followed by an electronic form to collate votes. This allows random numbers to be allocated for each vote and for the votes to be returned using an electronic form. GDPR statements can also be included in all interactions. This method is particularly straightforward for those already familiar with using mail merge, but it does require careful checking to ensure each parent votes only once.

As both parents have the entitlement to vote, the school will require the email addresses of all parents not just one parent of a pupil. Parents use the form to vote online. The results can then be downloaded and verified.

## **Approach Three**

### **28. Using an online meeting to conduct a poll**

This is similar to the face-to-face meeting outlined above (points 14 – 20). The clerk organises and chairs a meeting of parents eligible to vote using an online platform

and an anonymous poll app, for example Teams, Google Classroom. The ballot can be conducted during the online meeting.

## **E. Returns to EA**

29. Within seven days of the conclusion of the election process, the clerk must complete and return the results from the Parent Governor Election to the School Governance Service, EA using this form [Outcome of Parent Governor Election](#)
  
30. The clerk should retain a report of the proceedings, together with nomination forms and voting slips in accordance with the school's disposal of records schedule.

### **School Governance Service Contact Details**

Email [govsupport@eani.org.uk](mailto:govsupport@eani.org.uk)

Helpline 028 9041 8069



## School Governance Service

 [govsupport@eani.org.uk](mailto:govsupport@eani.org.uk)



[www.eani.org.uk](http://www.eani.org.uk)