



# So you want to be a school governor

**Service Children's Education**

**A guide for new school governance committee members**

# Introduction

- Every SCE school has a School Governance Committee (SGC). SGCs have the full backing and support of the Adjutant General as, amongst other things, they play an increasingly important role in monitoring and supporting the work of the school and in particular the work of the headteacher.
- SCE schools are keen to attract people in the community who can bring energy, experience and fresh ideas. Those who would make very good members of the School Governance Committee (SGC) might be put off because they think they need to be an expert.
- Not so - interest, enthusiasm and commitment are much more important.
- As with governors in the UK, members of the SGC bring a wealth of experience and interests from many walks of life. SGC members work closely with the school and HQ SCE to help make good decisions and secure the best possible education for the children.
- If you have never thought of putting yourself forward, but believe schools should give children the best start, please contact your local school.





## One principle underlies all SGC work:

- The main aim of an SGC is to help to raise the school's standards.
- This means more than the academic achievement of the pupils, although this is a very important part. It also includes all those things that develop well-rounded and confident students - from encouraging the performing arts to increasing the confidence of pupils with special educational needs.
- If you are reading this you have either decided to become a member of your local school's School Governance Committee (SGC), or are thinking about it and want to know what might be expected of you.
- If you have already volunteered for your SGC, you have joined the largest "volunteer army" (in the UK) - around 350,000 people.
- However, there are significant differences between the way a **school governance committee** operates and the role of governors in UK schools.
- Although UK school governors have a high public profile, it is quite possible that you do not have too much knowledge of what is involved. If you have school-age children, you will be familiar with terms such as the "National Curriculum", school budgets, OfSTED school inspections and National Curriculum Tests (SATS) - but you probably do not know the detail of how these – and a host of other issues – affect schools.

# Is it for me?

- If you can answer yes to the following questions and you live in the area, then you could well have what it takes to be a School Governance Committee member and help make a difference to our children's future.
  - Do you want to put something back into your local community?
  - Are you prepared to work as part of a team?
  - Do you have time to get to know your school, to go to meetings and read papers?
  - Are you comfortable asking questions?
  - Are you open to new ideas and ready to learn?
  - Do you want children to get the best from school?
- It helps to be a good listener as you will stand a much better chance of understanding how your school works.
- In the UK, school governors - people like you - are helping staff and headteachers ensure our children get the best from their school.
- Schools are changing - and so are School Governance Committees. The Government is committed to raising educational standards in the classroom, and to increasing the role of parents and the local community.
- Volunteers are needed to help all our children reach their full potential.





## First some guarantees.

- Members of School Governance Committees in SCE schools do not have responsibility for the running of the school. This remains very firmly with the Headteacher.
- The SGC is a team of people who work closely **with** the Headteacher to **represent** the local service community and **help** make key decisions vital to the successful running of the school.
- They **contribute** to decisions that directly affect the education and well-being of the pupils, play an important part in improving standards and help to **monitor** the school' budget.



# How much time does it take?

- The time that SGC members are able to give to the role varies but there are certain things they must be in a position to do, so be aware:
  - the SGC must meet at least once a term
  - SGC members are sometimes asked to serve on a sub-committee which might meet more often
  - meetings are sometimes held during the working day and sometimes during the evening
  - SGC members will need to prepare for meetings and there can be some papers to read
  - the SGC will receive training to help it work well in the unique Service environment – so you need to be prepared to attend at least one training session

## **Remember, you are not expected to be an expert**

- For example, you can be an active member of the finance sub-committee without being an accountant or brilliant at maths



# The role of the SGC



## **Members of School Governance Committees do not manage schools.**

- SCE schools are led and managed by their **senior leadership team** (SLT), which consists of the headteacher, and (depending on the size of the school), a number of other teaching staff such as a deputy head, assistant head(s), heads of Key Stages or departments, and – perhaps - heads of year.
- The purpose of the SGC is to enable the service community, and parents in particular, to contribute to the strategic direction and governance of the school. The aim of this contribution is to enhance educational provision and outcomes for pupils and families.

## **To provide a strategic view**

- The SGC helps to set, and monitor, the broad framework within which the headteacher and staff run the school. The SGC should focus on the key issues of raising standards of achievement, establishing high expectations, and promoting effective teaching and learning. Some strategic decisions involve setting targets: monitoring means asking to see if those targets have been met. It is not just about looking at results on paper. Making a visit to school during teaching hours is one of the best ways of assessing progress, but this only means occasional visits - perhaps once a year.

# The role of the SGC

## To act as critical friend

- The SGC provides the headteacher and staff with support, advice and information, drawing on its members' knowledge and experience. In these ways the SGC acts as a critical friend to the school. Critical friendship is about being willing to question and challenge when things do not look right: it is only achieved through trust and mutual respect.

## To ensure accountability

- The headteacher reports to the SGC on the school's performance and on other matters. The SGC has a right to discuss and question such matters, whilst always respecting the professional roles of the headteacher and other staff, and their responsibilities for the leadership and management of the school.





## Membership of the SGC



- The SGC normally has a minimum of nine members.
- SGC members do not need to be parents or know about education. More importantly, you will be able to offer your enthusiasm and commitment: if you are a parent you will understand, and be able to represent, other parents' concerns.
- People with business and management experience, or a host of other skills, can also offer extremely helpful expertise to the school. Whatever your status within the community, you can make a valuable contribution to the running of the school.
- The headteacher is a member of the SGC and the school staff are represented by one teacher, and one member of the support staff.
- The Chair of the SGC is nominated by the local Garrison Commander and each SGC will also have a “Vice-Chair” and a Clerk to the SGC. The Clerk does not need to be a SGC member.

# Meetings & committees

- The SGC works through termly meetings. These meetings are at the heart of what the SGC does, providing the democratic forum where decisions can be taken. If you think you are not going to be able to make most of the SGC meetings, the task is probably not for you.
- Some SGCs find that they meet twice a term, so that they can discuss issues in a timely manner, and to prevent the meetings becoming too long. Two to two-and-a-half hours is the norm for most meetings, which are scheduled to meet the needs of the group at large.
- SGC meetings must be quorate in order to make decisions and, for **full meetings** of the SGC, this is one-half of the membership.
- The work of the SGC is supported by setting up various sub-committees. Each SGC must appoint a **finance sub-committee** however it is up to each SGC which other sub-committees it has. Most concentrate on one or a combination of the SGC's main responsibilities:
  - the curriculum
  - health and safety
  - special and additional educational needs.



# Meetings & committees



- In order to contribute properly to the SGC you will need to be prepared to **volunteer** for one or two sub-committees. This is where you can be guided by your own inclinations and interests.
- Sub-committees always report back to the full SGC on what they have done and they should have a chair, clerk, or minute taker. Smaller schools may prefer to handle these matters at the full SGC meetings.
- As in the UK there are some areas where it is compulsory to delegate the business to a sub-committee set up especially. One such is the **Complaints' Appeals Panel**. This considers appeals from parents in line with the SCE Complaints' Policy. A sub-committee of the SGC is involved if parents wish to appeal against a decision to **exclude** a pupil.
- The amount of work and the frequency of meetings vary. For example, the finance committee is going to be at its busiest around budget-setting time, in the spring. As a very rough rule of thumb, you might expect a committee to meet with the same frequency as the main SGC - once or twice a term.

# Working parties

- Some SGCs also set up working groups or working parties.
- The difference between these and sub-committees is that they usually meet for a finite period of time, and deal with a one-off issue. This means that they do not only have to have members of the SGC on them; they can contain other people who have just as much say in those recommendations.
- An example might be a working group to look at delivering sex education, where you would want the views of parents and perhaps the wider community.





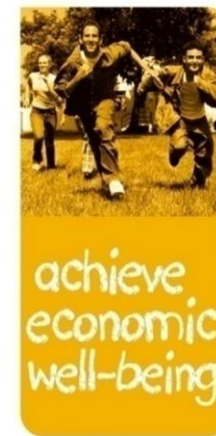
## The role of the headteacher

- Much of the SGC's role involves working with the headteacher to reach decisions. The headteacher plays a vital role as the SGC's main source of information about the school. He or she will probably liaise regularly with the chair of the SGC, but this does not remove the need to report fully to the SGC at termly meetings.
- Once a term the headteacher will submit a written report, which will concentrate on what the school is doing to meet the various priorities and targets set in the **School Improvement Plan**. This document will be circulated in advance of the SGC meeting, with the agenda, and is there for you to study and then ask questions.
- If there is anything that you are unsure about in the report, the meeting is the time to ask about it and to explore the issue. Moreover, if there are things not covered in the report that you think are important, you should also ask about them.
- **The headteacher's report** will usually be grouped under the headings of pupils, staff, curriculum, outcomes, self-evaluation, the school improvement plan, budget, premises and other issues such as health and safety, special educational needs, special events and any appeals.



# Every Child Matters

- When members of the SGC contribute to any decision, however far it may seem from the classroom, it should be made in the context of what is best for the pupils. This has been given a special focus in recent years through the **Every Child Matters** agenda. This is the name of a policy for schools enshrined in the Children Act 2004. Every school is expected to achieve five outcomes for their pupils: they are safe, they are healthy, they enjoy and achieve, they make a positive contribution to society and they achieve economic well-being.



# The curriculum



- In the broadest sense the curriculum is all the things that contribute to the education that the pupils receive in school. The aim is to have “a broad and balanced curriculum” to meet the needs of all the pupils.
- The largest part of the curriculum is covered by the **National Curriculum**. This determines what subjects must be taught and at what stage of schooling. All SCE schools follow the **English National Curriculum**. In first & primary schools teachers have particular responsibility for seeing that literacy and numeracy are taught according to the Primary National Strategy.
- Under the National Curriculum, a child's passage through school is divided into stages, known as **Key Stages**.

Key Stage	Year groups	Ages
Foundation Stage	Preschool - end of Reception Year	3 - 5
Key Stage 1	Years 1 - 2	5 – 7
Key Stage 2	Years 3 - 6	7 – 11
Key Stage 3	Years 7 - 9	11 – 14
Key Stage 4	Years 10 - 11	14 - 16
Key Stage 5	Years 12 - 13	17 - 18

# The curriculum

- An important responsibility of School Governance Committees is monitoring achievements at the end of each of these Key Stages. The performance of all children in England is assessed in national tests at the end of Key Stage 1, 2 and 3.
- This is done in a series of tests <sup>[1]</sup> known to most parents as SATs (Standard Assessment Tests). Performance at the end of Key Stage 4 (ages 14 to 16) is assessed through public examinations (GCSEs). The results for each school are published, and schools are related to each other in league tables. SGCs contribute to the debate about setting targets for performance in their schools at the end of Key Stages 2, 3 and 4. In practice the targets will be proposed by the headteacher after discussion with staff. <sup>[1]</sup> [Wales had national tests but has abandoned them ...](#)
- The other part of the curriculum that SGC's might be concerned with is the choice of subjects. This affects secondary schools more than primaries. For example, the National Curriculum specifies that all pupils in Key Stage 3 must study a foreign language, but it does not say which language.
- The SGC often also looks after special and additional educational needs. This involves ensuring that the requirements of pupils who have learning, emotional or physical needs are being met by the school.



# Staffing



- The only law affecting the number of staff that a school must have is that Key Stage 1 classes should not have more than 30 pupils to one teacher, except in special circumstances. Other than this, the headteacher in conjunction with HQ SCE, decides how many teachers and support staff he or she wishes to employ to deliver the curriculum.
- The formula used to determine overall staffing allocations is currently under review (05/2009).
- SGC's have a limited role in making staff appointments as all teachers are civil servants and their appointments are subject to rules established by the Civil Service Commissioners. If your school needs a new headteacher (or deputy), the selection procedure will involve the SGC Chair as part of a panel appointed for the purpose. There are very strict MoD rules governing the training of those who make up the selection panel for appointing any member of the teaching staff.
- When it comes to other teaching appointments, the headteacher is responsible for the whole recruitment process in conjunction with the MoD **People, Pay & Pensions Agency**. Many headteachers will ask the SGC to be involved in the process in some way.



# Staffing

- Staffing responsibilities do not stop with making appointments. All schools have **performance management** of staff. This is a system of review and appraisal. In SCE schools, responsibility for performance management of teachers is set out in the SCE Performance Management Policy and the SGC does not get involved. When it comes to the headteacher's annual review, the SGC Chair will participate - together with the schools' Link Inspector Adviser and / or the school's School Improvement Partner.
- As SCE teachers are MoD Civil Servants – all matters relating to pay and conditions of service are governed by MoD and SCE Policy, Rules and Guidance: SGC members play no part in this process.





# School improvement and funding



- Most decisions that affect the development of the school are going to involve spending money. Each school receives various sums of money annually, all of it from the Defence Budget via HQ SCE. The actual funding system of schools is quite complex, but the outcome is fairly simple: each spring the school knows how much money it has for the next financial year. It is then up to the senior leadership team – in conjunction with the SGC - to decide how this is going to be used.
- Most SGCs leave the detailed drawing up of the budget to the SLT and the finance sub-committee, some will have the final budget approved by the whole SGC. The sums involved can be large - millions of pounds in a big secondary school - which can make budgeting seem overwhelming. Notwithstanding this, the freedom for action is often fairly limited as many items, like salaries, bear costs that cannot be easily altered – at least in the short term.
- Most schools take advantage of the services of an Agency officer <sup>[1]</sup>, who will consult and advise on the budget under various headings, together with the senior leadership team, and other staff such as the bursar or secretary.

<sup>[1]</sup> School Support Officer

# School improvement and funding

- Therefore, although setting the budget is a very important job, and one that involves making key decisions about the school's future, it does not require you to spend hours trying to balance the books.
- Once set, the budget needs monitoring termly or twice-termly - a job for the finance sub-committee. If necessary, the committee can decide to divert sums from one heading to another, as might well be the case if an unexpected expenditure arises, or simply if an initial estimate was wrong.

## School buildings

- School buildings and their maintenance are the responsibility of Defence Estates: SGC members do not normally get involved with works services. Occasionally the SGC Chair – in his role as a senior member of the garrison or station – will play a more significant part.



# Health & Safety



- All the activities that take place in schools (and those carried out off the premises), have to be safe for all concerned.
- In SCE schools, it is the headteacher's responsibility for ensuring that this is so. SGC members themselves do not have to get involved in safety checks, but the SGC should ensure that the regular checks required are made by qualified staff. They should also be satisfied that staff are familiar with the routines for reporting problems or accidents. This responsibility might be delegated to a separate sub-committee.

## Support for new SGC members

- You should be given copies of various documents when you become a SGC member. Some of them, such as the school prospectus, the school profile and a list of staff, are particular to your school, while others might be national publications dealing with the National Curriculum.
- HQ SCE has someone who provides freely available support and training to SGC members – your local school's headteacher will be able to provide the appropriate details and or organise this support.

## Finally, what should you do to add your part to the work of the SGC?

- Well, first and obviously, attend meetings. If you really cannot make a meeting, you should submit your apologies and reasons in advance to the chair.
- Then join a committee, or two committees. As described earlier much of the work of the SGC is done through committees, and it is only as a member of a committee that you will be able to contribute fully.
- Many SGCs are developing a system where each SGC member is attached to a curriculum subject. If so, discuss the subject with the teacher / head of department responsible and learn what the school's aims are. Arrange with the teacher and headteacher to visit the school to see the subject being taught, and report back to the SGC.
- Even if the school does not have a curriculum allocation system you should arrange to visit the school, say, once a year. Some SGCs draw up a rota for school visits, which are **always agreed with the head**.
- You should also aim to attend school functions, not only plays and concerts (which hopefully you will want to see anyway), but some parents' evenings too, if your school has a policy of having SGC members attend these sessions. Without this public presence SGC members are not always seen to be active by the parents.



## Finally, what should you do to add your part to the work of the SGC?



- Lastly, you should be prepared to go on training. This is not a huge commitment, involving days off work. SGC training sessions are held in schools at times to suit everyone and last only 2 hours.
- Being a member of the School Governance Committee can be a rewarding experience. You will be playing an important part in improving the children's education and supporting the school's staff - and giving a lot to the school and the community usually means you will get a lot back. It is also an opportunity to develop new skills or practise existing ones such as chairing meetings, putting forward suggestions and asking the right questions.
- As with most things, the more you put into being a governor, the more you will get out of it. So this certainly means some commitment of time, and a willingness to learn. However, it needs enthusiasm more than time, and as you come to enjoy the work, the time spent should be a pleasure.