

# GOVERNOR HEADLINES

Welcome to issue #24 of Governor Headlines. This edition includes guidance on what to do if you receive a complaint, how to prepare for a school monitoring visit and how to carry out Section 128 checks for governors. There are also some tips on recruiting new parent governors and a link to an article discussing the 10 main challenges facing school governors today.

As always, if you have any thoughts or suggestions regarding Governor Headlines please contact [governorheadlines@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:governorheadlines@suffolk.gov.uk).

## What's New This Month – May 2019

### The Knowledge

Please find the latest edition of **The Knowledge** for May 2019 [here](#).

Please note that The Knowledge is a half-termly document and therefore not included in every monthly issue of Governor Headlines.



## What To Do and Not To Do If You Receive a Complaint

If you receive a parental complaint, we are always willing to discuss the process with you and give you advice about what steps to take. We will work with you every step

of the way and can assist you appointing investigators, if applicable, and will support you to find a resolution.

However, inspired by an article in [The Key for School Governors](#) please see below for some top tips in what to do and not do if you receive a complaint.

**Don't discuss complaints with complainants yourself.**

If a parent approaches you with a complaint about the school, do not try and address it there and then. Direct them to your school's complaints policy. As a governor, you need to avoid discussions with individuals about school management issues.

**Do...**

There will be different policies for staff and parental complaints, now is a good time to check they are up to date. The Department for Education (DfE) published policy for schools to adopt if they wish.

**Don't deviate from your policies.**

Always check your own policies before taking any action to respond to a complaint and follow them to the letter. The DfE will review complaints if requested by parents but this will be a review of whether the complaint was dealt with in line with your policy. They will not review the body of the complaint.

**Do ...**

If you update a policy part way through a complaint continue with the original policy until the process is complete. This will save on possible confusion.

**Don't post anything on social media.**

You might see the complaint being discussed on social media – especially if you're a parent governor and are on Facebook or in WhatsApp groups with other parents. Whatever you do, don't wade in. This could make things worse and is likely to go against your school's complaints policy. As above, it's not your job to talk to individuals about school issues, especially when your comments will be out in public. Don't talk to the press. Similarly, don't comment to the press unless it's been approved by your school.

**Do...**

As a preventative measure, make sure your school has a social media policy or set of guidelines in place that cover how you'll respond to a situation like this. Agree this as a governing board and make sure everyone is on the same page.

If your school is still a maintained school and you are contacted by the press Suffolk County Council's press office are available to advise you.

**Don't let anyone else get involved initially if they're not meant to.**

It's understandable for Headteachers to want to keep an eye on what's going on with a complaint. It's also understandable for governors to turn to the Headteacher for reassurance. Governors will also, with the best of intentions, want to be able to solve issues.

**Do...**

Ensure that the agreed governor, has full responsibility for the complaint. They can share with the Headteacher and governors that there has been a complaint, but **all** details of the complaint and complainant should remain confidential.

### **Don't share information freely.**

If you're not sure someone needs information about the complaint, don't share it. You don't want data protection worries on top of dealing with the initial complaint. Sometimes the information is sensitive, and it will usually involve someone's personal data.

### **Do...**

Only use approved communication channels. For example, if your board uses GovernorHub for documents relating to the complaint, always use this and don't attach information to emails or send text messages about the matter. Ensure that GovernorHub is up to date and that the permissions are set so that only the appropriate governors, if any, have access to this information. Ensure you have a personal school email address and use this for any governance work.

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## Section 128 Checks for Governors of Maintained Schools

We've recently had a few queries about the necessity of Section 128 checks for governors.

A Section 128 check is conducted to see whether a person is banned from being involved in the management and governance of schools. Local Authority maintained schools **aren't** required by legislation or statutory guidance to carry out Section 128 checks.

Despite this however it is recommended that the checks are conducted as they complement the required DBS checks by looking at aspects of people's history that, while not necessarily criminal, might still be cause for concern.

### **How Do You Carry out Section 128 Checks?**

As governors you will be able to identify which members of the governing body need to have a Section 128 check but it's a member of the school staff that will need to arrange the check. This is done by:

- For new governor appointments: If a DBS check is required with a barred list check the person arranging the check needs to specify 'children's workforce independent schools' when applying for the enhanced DBS. If the person doesn't need a barred list check they'll need to use the Department for Education's (DFE) [DfE sign-in portal](#).

- For existing governors: The person arranging the check needs to log into the [DfE sign-in portal](#) and carry out the check through the 'Teacher Regulation Agency'.
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## How to Encourage Parents to Become Parent Governors

If you are a maintained school, you are legally required to have a minimum of 2 parent governors on your governing body. All parents or carers of registered pupils at the school, at the time of election, are eligible to be parent governors. The exceptions are elected members of the Local Authority and anyone paid to work in the school for more than 500 hours in a consecutive 12-month period.

Parent governors can continue until the end of their term-of-office if their child moves on from the school, or if they are employed by the school after their election. Neither however would be eligible to re-stand for election to the parent position.

Our Local Authority Leadership and Governance team will of course do all we can to help source new governors but, as we don't have direct access to your parent body, there are a number of things you can do to help generate interest in the role.

### **Produce an Advert**

Your advert should give an overview of what the role involves and who can apply. You should outline what you expect from new governors in terms of time-commitments, attendance and committee membership. Whilst you can't require specific skills you can state a preference for any specific skills that you have, based on your governing bodies [skills audit](#). Ultimately though it'll be the parent body who decides who to elect to the role.

### **Publicise your Vacancy**

Once you've created your advert you'll need to make sure this is publicised in the right places. The advert can be placed in your school newsletter or on the school website or sent via your method of parent communication. If you have a social media profile for your school you may like to post your advert on there. You may also like to create flyers to hand out in the playground or produce posters that can be put up around the school.

### **Host an Open Evening or Attend Parent's Evenings and School Events**

Our Govern Suffolk recruitment campaign statistics show that some of the most interest we've received has been from people who have been directly encouraged to apply by current or former governors. You might like to run an open evening and invite parents to come along and find out more about the role. You can then address some of the common misconceptions about governance, one of the most common being that you need to have been employed in education to be a school governor, and promote the benefits of governance, such as personal development and training

opportunities. It may also be beneficial for a governor to be present at parent's evenings or other school events such as sports day.

For further guidance on how to appoint new governors please see our [Recruitment Toolkit](#).

Guidance on the election procedure of parent and staff governors can be found [here](#).

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## School Monitoring Visits

As we've now entered the Summer term you may have begun to think about a school monitoring visit. [The Key for School Governors](#) have recently published some guidance on carrying out these visits, which we have summarised below.

The first step in preparing for a monitoring visit is to liaise with somebody at the school to find a mutually convenient time. Teaching staff often have many different demands on their time so if there is a specific individual that you would like to meet with you will need to be mindful of their schedule. Visits can be arranged via your clerk or by communicating with the school's office and admin staff, the Headteacher should also be informed prior to your visit out of courtesy, even if their presence at the visit isn't a requirement.

Monitoring visits can be carried out by any member of the governing body, not just the Chair or Vice-Chair, and are typically most productive when scheduled during the school day, however we understand that this may be difficult depending on the availability of your governors. If your governing body works full-time it may be worth inquiring with employers about your right to time off work for governance duties. Although it isn't a statutory requirement some employers allocate a certain number of paid hours for public duties.

The purpose of your visit should also be clarified in advance and the Headteacher and relevant member of staff, if appropriate, should be informed of the reason for your monitoring, for example to observe the implementation of a new marking policy. If you have specific questions to ask it would also be beneficial for the staff member involved to see these in advance so that they're better prepared for your visit.

You should always remember that your role in monitoring visits is observational only. You aren't there to judge staff or to take part in formal lesson observations. If you're unsure about what's expected of you, you may like to check whether your school has a visit policy or guidance pack which could give you further information.

Once you've carried out a school monitoring visit you should report your observations to the rest of the governing body. The contents of your report and how it's delivered, whether in person or in writing, should be agreed by the governing body prior to your visit. It is also good practice to share a copy of the report with any staff

members involved in the monitoring so that they can be given the chance to add additional comments.

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## 10 Challenges in School Governance

Recruiting experts in education, Hays, have put together a booklet on 10 challenges currently faced by governors, together with advice on how to manage these challenges.

To read the booklet please click [here](#).

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## Admission to a School Reception Year and Entry to a Nursery Class

The arrangements for full and part-time admission to a school Reception Year and entry to a Nursery Class can be found in the [attached letter](#).

If you have any further queries please contact Georgina Beard at [george.beard@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:george.beard@suffolk.gov.uk) or on 01473 264630.

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## International Festival of Learning – 28<sup>th</sup> June 2019



**Mark Dawe, Chief Executive for Association of Employment & Learning Providers (AELP) has been announced for this year's International Festival of Learning at West Suffolk College.**

At this year's festival on 28 June Mark Dawe will be participating in a panel discussion where he'll be discussing everything to do with Apprenticeships & Work

Based Learning. This is a great session for both schools, colleges and businesses alike.

The International Festival of Learning has many more sessions from top speakers, including – Amanda Spielman, Alison Peacock, Mary Myatt and Marc Rowland. To find out more [click here](#).

And don't forget to use your official festival partner discount code (**intospring15**) to get 15% off your ticket price!

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