

view vision visit ability academy account adds approach area attending authority background balance behaviour bring busy

chair **challenge** change child children committed committees **community** confidence context contribute

critical data decision **“It’s not just who you are...”** different discuss easy education

effectively engage expect **experience** expertise facing finance focus **governors** great group help

important improvement heads information **it’s what you do** involved kind knowledge

**knows** lawyer leadership learning level listen manager meetings operates opportunity outcomes parent

perspective pick point policy positive **and how you do it”** progress pupils real relationship representatives

role run same **school** senior set sitting **skills** someone specific spend **staff** strategic students suggestions

support talking teach **teacher** team training turn **understanding** useful value view vision visit ability academy

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children **What makes a good school governor?** committed committee

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expertise facing finance focus // 2012



Loic Menzies is Director of LKMco, a Tutor for Canterbury Christ Church University’s Faculty of Education and a trustee of the charity Changemakers. He specialises in education policy, youth-development, social-enterprise and school based teacher training. He was previously Associate Senior Manager and Head of History and Social Sciences at St. George’s R.C School in North West London. He holds a degree in Politics, Philosophy and Economics from Magdalen College, Oxford.



John Roberts was previously Director of Standards at George Tomlinson School in Bolton. He is also creator of ‘The Rewards System’, a computer program described as *“the most powerful tool available for monitoring student behaviour.”* John and Loic have previously co-authored a chapter of the Policy First report “Ethos and Culture in Schools in Challenging Circumstances” focused on defining school ethos and culture.



Garth Stahl is an LKMco Research Associate. He holds an MA in International Education from New York University and an MEd in Educational Research from the University of Cambridge. He is currently working on a PhD at University of Cambridge looking at the educational experiences of white working class boys while supervising on the Education Studies Tripos. He and Loic recently co-authored an article on the aspirations of white working-class boys in South London. He spent 5 years teaching in challenging London schools and has worked for Teacher’s TV and the New York City Department of Education.



This report was written for Teach First by the education and youth-development organisation LKMco. LKMco believes that society has a duty to ensure children receive the support they need in order to make a fulfilling transition to adulthood. LKMco works towards this vision by providing teacher training and school improvement and by helping a range of organisations to develop projects for young people. LKMco uses its experience to carry out academic and policy research like this across the education and youth sectors.

[www.lkmco.org.uk](http://www.lkmco.org.uk) / [@LKMco](https://twitter.com/LKMco) / [info@lkmco.org](mailto:info@lkmco.org)

*The front cover of this report includes the 100 words most used in describing the qualities of a good governor. The back cover includes the 100 words most used in describing the contribution of Teach First ambassador governors.*

# “It’s not *just* who you are- it’s what you do and how you do it”

*How can Teach First ambassador governors best address educational disadvantage?*

## Executive Summary

### What makes a good governor?

*Being a good governor is not just about who you are – a stakeholder or an expert; it is about what you do and how you do it. The ideal governor is able to offer sensitive, well communicated and informed challenge based on good relationships and an understanding of the school’s social and educational context, applying relevant expertise where appropriate.*

- The term “skills based” as applied to governor recruitment is ambiguous and hides too much complexity to be useful.
- By differentiating between ‘experience and expertise’ and ‘competencies and dispositions’ the ambiguity of ‘skills’ can be untangled.
- Models of governance that lead to local and parental representation are hugely popular however there is a tension between this and a widely held view that parents are the least effective governors, focusing too much on day to day concerns about their individual child. We call this ‘The paradox of parents’. Training and more active selection could potentially resolve this paradox. We describe existing good practice in this area.
- Knowledge, understanding and experience of education are highly valued by most although not all.
- The recent Education White Paper (DfE 2010) and the report “Who Governs the Governors” (Carmichael and Wild, 2011) have focused on governors skills in specific areas of such as law and finance. We call this ‘experience and expertise’.
- Our research suggests that ‘experience and expertise’ are highly valued but no more than ‘representation’ or ‘competencies and dispositions’.
- Part of the value of ‘experience and expertise’ is that it can function as a source of competencies.
- Effective governance involves challenging, questioning, looking beyond the information provided and being strategic. Providing support to the school and leadership team can also be valued but views on this vary.
- In order to do the above, governors need to be analytical, well informed and able to communicate in such a way as to build and maintain positive trusting relationships. We call these qualities ‘competencies and dispositions’.
- Governors need to participate in the school. Regular attendance at meetings is a minimum requirement which not all governors meet but they should also spend time in the school outside of meetings.
- In our conclusion we use the above findings to present four governor profiles showing the types of governors who appear to be most valuable to schools. We call these ‘The Forensic’, ‘The local’, ‘The expert’ and ‘The educationalist.’ Different schools need and want different types of governors and all can be appropriate in different circumstances.

### Recruitment

- There is evidence that as a result of “low governance capital” (James et al. 2011), schools in challenging circumstances are particularly likely to suffer from shortages of community and parent governors as well as those with a business background.
- The word ‘shortage’ is often a misnomer and ‘vacancy’ would be a more appropriate term.

### Policy Lessons

- The stakeholder model of governance is popular but mainly because of local and parental representation. It is not viewed as a barrier to effective governance and allows a lot of flexibility at present. However, so long as local and parental representation is maintained, policy changes will not be unpopular. Schools may make some changes to their governing bodies as a result of policy changes but do not feel an urgent need to do so.

- Parents are considered both the most valuable and the least effective governors by many. Training and careful recruitment should be considered solutions to escape this 'paradox of parents.'
- Changes to the size of governing bodies met a nonplussed reaction. Schools might or might not make changes and there was little appetite or resistance to current policy.
- There was some evidence that moves towards academisation and marketisation could lead to an increased need for business and marketing skills on governing bodies.
- Many governing bodies are already asking very effective questions although some felt these were not challenging enough. The most valued questions related to pupil learning and outcomes.
- Our research gave mixed results with regards to governing bodies' focus on strategic compared to operational concerns. Most interview respondents were well aware that their board should be strategic and considered it to be so. However, this was not always consistent and our survey data gave a very different picture. Operational involvement by governors was not always considered a problem.
- 'Leadership of governors' in which the Head, Chair or Clerk actively led and managed the board played an important role in making governing bodies effective. Our research suggested an acute awareness of the tension between Heads being accountable to governing bodies as well as being their primary source of information and occasional leader. Strengthening the expertise of Chairs and Clerks would therefore be a useful step in creating more effective boards with reliable information to hand. The creation of National Leaders of Governance is therefore to be welcomed.

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table talking

**It's not just who you are... it's what you do and how: How can Teach First ambassador governors best address educational disadvantage? A report by LKMco for Teach First by Loic Menzies, John Roberts & Garth Stahl // 2012**