

STEM Ambassador's role as a School Governor

This factsheet is for you if you are thinking about, or have recently become, a school governor in England, Wales or Northern Ireland.

There are many ways to be an active STEM Ambassador and being a school governor is one of them.

Being a school governor is a unique and rewarding role, being instrumental in supporting schools and teachers to make a real difference to children. You have an important task to help shape the education of all children in the school now and for years to come.

In your role as a governor you directly influence the future of the children in your school. As a STEM ambassador you can share a unique insight into the opportunities and possibilities open to your pupils, raise the profile of STEM and perhaps inspire a new generation of scientists, technologists, engineers and mathematicians.

As a governor you will be joining the school on its journey; helping to lead the way together with other members of the governing body using a shared vision to help children to be the very best that they can be.

Why should I become a governor?

A good and effective board of governors is made up of a range of people bringing different skills, experiences and viewpoints to be able to support and steer the school effectively. **Your skills and knowledge from the STEM workplace are invaluable to the school, and very welcome.**

The demand for STEM skills in the UK has reached a critical point. We frequently see headlines predicting a shortfall in STEM workers, and hear calls for earlier career intervention in schools and improved industry and education links. By investing your time, this is your chance to be a valuable part of that solution.

In addition to being a fulfilling role, being a governor can also be a way for you to enhance skills for your own CV, such as leadership or team working.

"My main reason for becoming a governor was to use the skills I have from healthcare to help my local school. I feel that I can help the school's management team and support the school, and contribute to the education of my children. I use my role to raise the profile of health and science and careers. I hope that this will motivate, not only my daughters but other children, to take an interest in working in a STEM area."

"The questions that children come up with are brilliant. 'Do you blow things up?' is a favourite!"

The Importance of School Governors

Governors are "are the vision setters and strategic decision makers for their schools. They play a vital role in ensuring the best possible education that takes every child as far as their talents allow."

Lord Nash, ex Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Schools

The governing board work to ensure high standards of achievement for all children. This is achieved by:

- Setting a clear ethos for the school, and strategic direction for the future
- Ensuring senior leaders are held to account
- Making sure that the financial practices of the school are sound

Do not be deterred if you think you do not have expertise in these areas. Your experience of working in a STEM profession will add vital insight and skills to the governing body.

How can I use my STEM skills?

There are many ways! Here are some examples, but you may well have ideas already about how you would like to help.

- Meet with the STEM lead, and ask how they feel about STEM in school. What is their vision, and how can you help them in achieving this? Visit classrooms, watch activities, look at displays and talk to the children and young people. This may spark more ideas of how you can support STEM in school.
- You can raise the profile of STEM amongst staff and governors by requesting an agenda item for the next meeting. Look out for headlines on STEM, for example employment figures, exam results, and ask for these to be discussed. Challenge the board to consider how they are tackling issues and promoting STEM.
- You may be able to work with the STEM lead in school to look at the curriculum and identify where it can be strengthened. Look for opportunities to link STEM with other subjects, for example science and literacy, maths and art.
- Can you help teachers to create some resources about your workplace? Can you pose a problem to be solved using STEM? Perhaps you have knowledge of some of the areas and can provide some training / advice to the teachers.
- If teachers tell you that they require CPD in STEM areas in order to teach it well, be their advocate and take this to the head teacher or next meeting.
- Perhaps you could visit during the school day and work with a group of children, for example on practical work, or tutoring on an area that you are confident in. Or could you arrange a visit for the children to your workplace? It is really valuable for children to see what a 'real' STEM professional looks like; you may well become a role model that they aspire to!
- There are many opportunities for STEM enrichment and funding, for example British Science Week, Crest Awards, STEM Ambassadors – it can be overwhelming and very time consuming! The STEM Lead in your school may welcome an offer of you looking into these to find out more, or helping to fill in a grant application.

- You may also be able to offer more general employment advice for pupils, such as interview skills and CV writing.

“I have worked directly with pupils on careers information, and find it very rewarding to help to open up career choices for them. It is always interesting to hear their views!”

Your first visit to the school

School visits are an integral part of getting to know the school. This could be visiting an event or to see something specific, for example practical work in science. Taking part in school life and seeing the children behind the figures can really put the data into context and help you to see the impact of your work.

If you haven't already, take a look at the school website. Get a feel for the school by reading about their vision and ethos – and take a look at any pictures, trips, and current topics. You can also do an internet search for the most recent Ofsted report. The website www.compare-school-performance.service.gov.uk shows how your school compares with others.

It may help to have some questions prepared for your first visit. For example, ‘have you had visits from STEM ambassadors in the past? What did they do?’ or ‘have the children taken part in any career events?’

Bring some identification with you, your DBS certificate if you have it, and a notebook or tablet for making notes but do ask if this is ok beforehand. You may be given an official form to use for notes. There will be a school policy for visitors to the site; please read and become familiar with it. And remember that any information you are given must remain confidential.

Business wear is not required for a first visit; smart casual is fine (although if you prefer business wear then that is entirely acceptable!)

Your first governor meeting

“When I first started, I had to remind myself that challenging the head teacher for more information, or questioning things, was welcomed!”

Governing bodies meet approximately 6 times per year, normally in the evening.

You will be sent details of the time, and possibly the minutes of the last meeting and reading to be done in advance.

You may also be given an area of responsibility or sub-committee to join.

Data is an essential tool for monitoring and improving the performance of children.

It might seem that there are reams of it! The head teacher, or head of department, may do a presentation on the schools' data at the governor's meeting. If you aren't sure what it means – ask!

You could always arrange another time to sit with a teacher and go through the data again to become more confident with it.

Education may seem to have its own special language.

Here are some common terms and abbreviations to get you started. Please remember that there is no such thing as a silly question and do ask for further information or clarification on anything being discussed. There may be other governors in the room who are feeling unsure and are glad that you asked!

CPD	Continuing professional development.
SDP	School development plan. This covers what the priorities are for the school, what it intends to achieve and how. This is based on Ofsted, and the school's Self Evaluation Form (SEF).
PP	Pupil Premium. Additional funding from the government for publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils.
PPA	PPA is time set aside for teachers during the school day to work on Planning, Preparation and Assessment.
Key Stage	Blocks of year groups according to the national curriculum.
FE, HE	Further education. Education beyond secondary level that does not lead to a degree. Higher Education. Education beyond secondary level that does lead to a degree.
NQT	Newly Qualified teacher. A teacher who has been qualified for less than one year.
HLTA	Higher level teaching assistant. In addition to the duties of a Teaching Assistant, they have an increased responsibility such as teaching classes and marking pupils' work.

What about Ofsted?

Ofsted is the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills. Ofsted will look at school governance during an inspection. They will consider how effective the governing body is, and will include this in the report. You can discuss with the head teacher in advance whether you wish to speak to the inspectors or not.

"It was fascinating to see what is involved in an Ofsted inspection. I was pleased to be able to represent the governing body in showcasing the school and its highlights. I've done a number of school visits now and feel I know the school, and was happy to talk to the inspectors."

How to apply to be a governor

You can contact a particular school directly, or the Local Education Authority, or use the website www.inspiringgovernance.org which can match you with a school.

Don't forget to record the activity on the STEM Ambassadors website!

Good luck in your new role as school governor.

On behalf of educators and children – thank you!

Further reading

There are a number of resources devoted to governance. The governing body of your school may provide you with some. These websites may also be useful to you:

The National Governance Association.

www.nga.org.uk

A free website connecting volunteer governors with schools.

www.inspiringgovernance.org

[Governance Handbook and Competency Framework. The Department for Education and National College for Teaching and Leadership](#)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/governance-handbook>

The Association of Governing Bodies of Independent Schools (AGBIS). www.agbis.org.uk

[Briefing paper for House of Commons but useful guide](#)

https://www.legco.gov.hk/general/english/library/stay_informed_overseas_policy_updates/school_governance.pdf